COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE (CDDG)

E-DEMOCRACY HANDBOOK

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate General of Democracy
Democratic Governance Division

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1.   Introduction

The terms of reference of the CDDG for the biennium 2018-2019 include specific task iv:

"*In the field of e-democracy,*
   - *in accordance with Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)5 on standards for e-voting, hold a review meeting on its implementation in 2019;*
   - *develop guidelines on e-democracy as a toolkit;*
   - *oversee the implementation of the priority "building democracy online" of the Internet Governance – Council of Europe Strategy 2016-2019.*"

The CDDG set up a working group on e-democracy, which met three times:

   - at its meetings on 27 November 2018 and 14-15 March 2019 respectively, the working group discussed the outline, content and structure of the guidelines on e-democracy in the form of a toolkit on the basis of Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on electronic democracy;
   - at its meeting on 24 May 2019, the CDDG Bureau examined the suggested approach and agreed that, whilst guidelines should be a high-level instrument addressed to Council of Europe member States, the toolkit should be a practical instrument which provides 'practitioners' with guidance and includes examples and practical steps to be taken;
   - at its third meeting on 12-13 September 2019, the working group finalised the draft Guidelines on e-democracy in the form of a toolkit, asking for further practical examples in relation to e-democracy initiatives or projects to be included in the Guidelines and a glossary to be added.

At its meeting on 15 November 2019, the Bureau of the CDDG reviewed the draft Guidelines in the form of a toolkit. While agreeing with the substance of the Guidelines, the Bureau considered that additional work was necessary to refine the wording of the text and make it reader-friendly, ensure its internal coherence and bring out a clear narrative, prior to its final approval. The Bureau, therefore, instructed the Secretariat to transmit the draft Guidelines in the form of a toolkit to the CDDG for approval in substance at its meeting of 9-11 December 2019. At the same time, the Bureau proposed that, at this meeting, the CDDG should appoint two Rapporteurs with the task of finalising the draft Guidelines, in view of their further examination by the Bureau at its first meeting in 2020 and final approval by the CDDG at its first plenary meeting in 2020.

At its 10th plenary meeting in December 2019, the CDDG examined the draft Guidelines in the form of a toolkit. Following an exchange of views, with the addition of case studies and some modifications, the CDDG approved the Guidelines in their substance. At the same time, it appointed Ms Monika Filipova (Slovak Republic), Ms Gordana Gapikj-Dimitrovska (North Macedonia) and Mr Paul Rowsell (United Kingdom) as Rapporteurs, asking them to make the appropriate changes to the text with a view to bringing out a clear narrative and ensuring its internal coherence. It also instructed the Secretariat to collect additional case studies and to involve the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance.

The CDDG decided that the Guidelines should be submitted to the next Bureau and then to the 11th plenary meeting of the CDDG scheduled to take place in April 2020 for final approval.

The 11th plenary meeting of the CDDG could not take place in April 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, in-person meetings of the Committee and its Bureau could not be scheduled for the rest of the year because of the uncertainties due to the pandemic and the measures to tackle it.

At its online meeting on 20 April 2020, the Bureau examined the Guidelines as redrafted by the Rapporteurs. The Secretariat informed the Bureau that the Guidelines in the form of a toolkit, because of their nature, would remain a CDDG document; they would not be submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption. The Bureau expressed support for the text. It asked the Secretariat to finalise the Guidelines with the support of the Centre of Expertise, to draft the part on artificial intelligence and to update the Guidelines with a few considerations and case studies concerning the response to Covid-19 while ensuring that the text remains focused on e-democracy rather than the response to Covid-19.

At its online meeting on 30 July 2020, the Bureau considered the Guidelines in the form of a toolkit, which were renamed 'Handbook'. Subsequently, Bureau members provided comments in writing, which were included.

2.   Additional considerations and proposals relating to future work

According to its terms of reference for 2020-2021, the CDDG will continue to work on aspects relating to e-democracy in the context of the implementation of two specific tasks assigned by the Committee of Ministers:
-   the preparation of a study on the impact of digital transformation, including artificial intelligence and automated decision-making, on democracy and governance;
-   the drafting of a recommendation and/or guidelines on new technologies and the different stages of the electoral process.

While the present Guidelines in the form of a toolkit focus on e-democracy (the e-Democracy Handbook), through these two tasks the CDDG will be able to further explore the issues of e-government, digitalisation of public services and e-enabled elections, which are only broached here although they are closely interconnected with e-democracy.

In addition, in the context of the work relating to Covid-19, CDDG members are sharing case studies relating to digital innovations and solutions to respond to the crisis. This wealth of information will be presented and analysed in the report on *Democratic governance and the response to Covid-19* which will be published before the end of 2020.

A final consideration is that, in line with the importance that Council of Europe member States attach to digitalisation, the CDDG should try to address it throughout its work, even if not specifically relating to it and whether it aims at the elaboration of guidelines or recommendations or the compilation of good practices. The CDDG should also encourage the World Forum for Democracy and the European Local Democracy Week to devote greater attention to e-democracy aspects in their activities.

Likewise, the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance could be invited to develop toolkits in the area of e-democracy and e-governance, to better respond to the needs of member States, at different levels of government. In addition, the Centre should look into further digitalising its work, for instance by organising online training and seminars and turning its toolkits into interactive digital tools.

3.   Action required

The CDDG is invited to give its final approval to the Guidelines in the form of a toolkit (the e-Democracy Handbook).

The CDDG is invited to propose activities in the area of e-democracy to be developed by the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance.

E-DEMOCRACY HANDBOOK

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PART A: E-DEMOCRACY

A.1. Introduction and context

Digital technologies have become a pervasive feature in all aspects of modern life. Democracy is no exception.

The Council of Europe has been a pioneer in identifying the opportunities and risks that technology presents to democracy: in 2009, Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on electronic (e-democracy) was the first international legal instrument to set standards in the field of e-democracy. It had been preceded by the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2004)15 on electronic governance ("e-governance") in 2004.

Whether in the area of democracy or in the area of government and public administration, *when adequate safeguards are in place*, technology can play a role in strengthening participation, inclusiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, transparency, openness and accountability, fundamental principles of good democratic governance. In a nutshell, technology can improve the quality of government and help meet people's needs and expectations, contributing greater trust in public institutions. To refer to widely known principles and targets, it can help authorities, at all levels of government, to apply the Council of Europe 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance and meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 11 (making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and 16 (building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

The key sentence, however, is *when adequate safeguards are in place*. Technology provides manifold opportunities to strengthen democracy and governance but it can also adversely affect the enjoyment of individual rights and freedoms, for instance as regards privacy and data protection; it can lead to opacity of electoral campaigning and political decision-making, thus weakening the democratic process; it can create divides and new grounds of discrimination based on e-literacy or internet access.

The Council of Europe addresses these concerns though a wide range of activities in the areas of data protection, media freedom and education. At the request of the Committee of Ministers, at the time of writing the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) is preparing a study on the impact of digital transformation on democracy and governance. This study is much needed as an overview on the role of digital technologies on the overall functioning of democratic institutions and the delivery of governance in Council of Europe member States is missing. The CDDG has also been asked to develop a Committee of Ministers' recommendation or guidelines on new technologies and their use in the different stages of the electoral process, taking into account the work of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission).[2]

The present Handbook should therefore be seen in the context of the many activities that the Council of Europe is developing in the area of democracy and technology, indicating an increasing awareness from the part of member States that the process of digitalisation of the public sector should be regulated according to common standards and draw from each other's best practice.

In the past few years, two key developments promise to further increase the trend towards digitalisation in the public sector and to amplify the impact of technology on democracy and governance.

The first development is the rise of artificial intelligence, a technology which is often

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[2] CDDG Terms of Reference for 2020-2021

referred to as strategic and which represents a game changer. Following the decision of the ministerial meeting in Helsinki in May 2019, the Committee of Ministers has set up the Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI).[3] CAHAI has the task to examine the feasibility and potential elements of a legal framework for the development, design and application of artificial intelligence, based on the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Through its study on digital transformation and the activities of a Rapporteur on Democracy and Technology, the CDDG actively contributes to the work of the CAHAI and stands ready to ensure any follow up that may be required within its field of competence.

The second development is the Covid-19 pandemic. The need to ensure the continuity of governance despite the lockdown measures has acted as a catalyst for innovation across the public sector, leading to the digitalisation of public services and the simplification of procedures and working methods of the public administration and democratic institutions alike, at an unprecedented speed and at all level of governments.

At the initiative of its Bureau, the CDDG has been collecting case studies on the member States' response to the pandemic[4] and organised an online thematic meeting on *A democratic governance response to Covid-19*[5]*.* These activities will contribute to the preparation of a report on the same subject to be published before the end of 2020. Amongst other matters, the report will illustrate the role of digitalisation in responding to the emergency by showcasing practical solutions and case studies.

A.2. Purpose of the present Handbook

> The starting point of the present Handbook is Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on electronic (e-democracy). This recommendation is the first international legal instrument to set standards in the field of e-democracy. It offers the governments of Council of Europe member States and other stakeholders a catalogue of 102 Guidelines and 80 Principles for introducing, strengthening and reviewing e-democracy.

The recommendation is supplemented by a Glossary and 5 Indicative Guides, which are practical tools for practitioners requiring hands-on information about combining modern information and communication tools and democratic requirements and practice. The Indicative Guides are:

- No. 1: Generic tools and policies for an electronic democracy
- No. 2: A roadmap approach to e-democracy
- No. 3: A checklist for the introduction of e-democracy tools
- No. 4: A framework for reporting e-democracy initiatives
- No. 5: Evaluating e-democracy

The Recommendation and its pertaining documents were prepared by the Ad hoc Committee on e-Democracy (CAHDE, 2006-2008), an ad hoc structure which was set up by the Committee of Ministers specifically for this purpose.[6]

> The present Handbook, elaborated at the request of the Committee of Ministers, is intended as a practical tool to help member States and a wide range of stakeholders give concrete implementation to Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1. In doing so, this Handbook takes into account developments that have taken place since the adoption of the recommendation, the evolution of the terminology and approach to e-democracy as well

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[3] Webpage of the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence
[4] https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/cddg-and-covid
[5] https://www.coe.int/en/web/good-governance/thematic-meeting
[6] https://www.coe.int/t/dgap/democracy/Activities/GGIS/CAHDE/Default_en.asp#TopOfPage

as the experience of Council of Europe member States.

The first paragraph of Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 reads: '*[The Committee of Ministers] recommends that member states:*
1. consider making use of the opportunities afforded by e-democracy to strengthen democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes;
2. consider and implement e-democracy as the support and enhancement of democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes by means of information and communication technology (ICT)'.

Eleven years on, Council of Europe member States have resolutely embarked on this course, whether in the area of e-voting, e-participation or e-administration.

Since the adoption of this recommendation, the use of digital technologies in the public sector has become increasingly widespread. Data collected on an annual basis by the United Nations since 2003 shows a constant growth of the E-Government Readiness Index (EGDI) of Council of Europe member States.
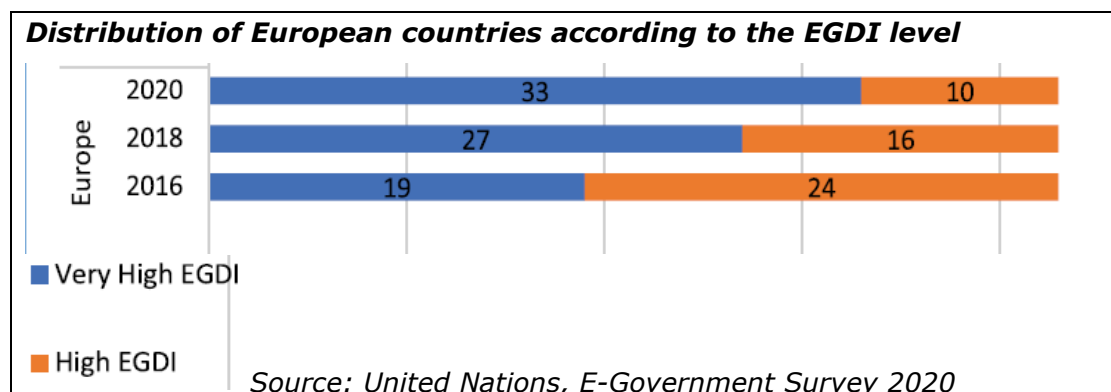

E-Government Readiness Index (EGDI), United Nations

EGDI is a composite indicator that consists of three indices (online service index, telecommunication index and human capital index) that are equally weighted. The three indices that make up the EGDI cover a broad range of topics that are relevant for e-government:
• The *online service index* measures a government's capability and willingness to provide services and communicate with its citizens electronically.
• The *telecommunication infrastructure index* measures the existing infrastructure that is required for citizens to participate in e-government.
• The *human capital index* is used to measure citizens' ability to use e-government services.

In 2020, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Iceland, Norway, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, France and Lithuania feature amongst the top twenty countries worldwide as regards this index.[7]

Distribution of European countries according to the EGDI level

Europe	Very High EGDI	High EGDI
2020	33	10
2018	27	16
2016	19	24

Source: United Nations, E-Government Survey 2020

As a tool, and in line with the focus on multilevel governance of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), this Handbook provides simple factsheets, checklists and concrete examples of policies, measures and mechanisms that can

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[7] United Nations, E-Government Survey 2020

contribute to enriching a democratic culture and strengthening democratic practices and institutions at national, regional and local level, through the use of digital technologies.

In line with the consistent approach used by the Council of Europe in the area of democracy and of e-democracy in particular, this Handbook is addressed to the broad range of actors of democracy, such as public authorities and their representatives, political institutions, individuals, NGOs and civil society at large, including media, academia and the business community.

Digital Government Review, OECD

Amongst the many activities carried out by the OECD in the area of e-democracy, the digital government review assesses, on a country-by-country basis, the state of data-driven policies in the public sector. It also explores the underlying institutional governance and coordination arrangements for digital government and their impact on policy implementation.

A.3. Explaining e-Democracy

What is e-Democracy?

Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 defines e-Democracy as the support and enhancement of democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes by means of information and communication technologies (ICT).[8]

For the purposes of this Handbook, **e-Democracy** is intended as the support and enhancement of democracy, democratic institutions (at all levels of government) and democratic processes by digital means. **E-Governance** is intended as the use of digital means by the public administration (at all levels) to exercise its functions and deliver public services. These working definitions are provided to facilitate understanding, as the two concepts often overlap.

Technology is the enabler. The main objective of the use of technology in the area of democracy is to support and strengthen democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes and spread democratic values.

E-democracy a strategy for supporting and strengthening democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes and spreading democratic values. It is additional, complementary to, and interlinked with traditional processes of democracy.

E-democracy must respect and implement fundamental freedoms, human rights and minority rights, including freedom of, and access to, information. It must be human-centred and not technology-centred.

E-democracy is based on the democratic, human, social, ethical and cultural values of the society in which it is implemented. It relies on citizens' trust and is an opportunity to accrue this trust.

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[8] For the purposes of the present Handbook, the expression 'information and communication technologies (ICT)' is used indifferently from 'digital technologies', the latter being more frequently used in current terminology.

> E-democracy concerns of all actors of society and all levels of government.

Tools, policies and mechanisms of e-Democracy

Indicative Guide No. 1: Generic tools and policies for an electronic democracy provides a non-exhaustive catalogue of 33 tools and policies of e-Democracy. The Guide is intended as a practical tool for practitioners who consider introducing e-Democracy practices. For each practice, the Guide indicates:

- basis of the initiative: initiator, reasons, objectives and embedding in democracy;
- management: partners, key actors, sustainability and follow-up;
- other aspects: political support, main added value.

The present Handbook explores some of these tools and policies, namely:

- e-voting, such as e-elections and e-referendums;
- and forms of e-participation such as e-petitions and e-consultations.

Furthermore, this Handbook will explore the use of digital means in the functioning of democratic institutions, at local, regional or national, as regards:

- their own working methods (for instance, videoconference meetings, electronic voting);
- their staff working methods (remote working, use of electronic signatures);
- the delivery of services to the public.

These tools, policies and mechanisms have become particularly topical during the Covid-19 emergency, as they have allowed for the continuity of government and public service activities despite the lockdown measures introduced in the great majority of Council of Europe member States.

E-democracy tools, policies and mechanisms continuously evolve, as the rapid development of technology opens up new possibilities. An update of the Glossary supplementing Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 is therefore available on the Council of Europe website.

FACTSHEET: Tools and policies of e-Democracy (source: Indicative Guide No. 1: Generic tools and policies for an electronic democracy)	
Tools	**Description**
E-Campaigning	Engaging in a co-ordinated way, by electronic means, with people and encouraging people to engage with each other in order to mobilise and/or convince individuals in political campaigns to promote causes
E-Citizens Relations Management	Public authorities personalize especially citizens' information to provide citizen-customized information and improve the quality of data of public administration about its citizens
E-Complaints	In particular public authorities using ICTs to provide citizens with means for complaint, conflict resolution and in combination with other initiatives to establish some citizen relationship management
E-Consultation	Collecting opinions of designated persons or the public at large on a specific policy issue without necessarily mandating the decision maker
E-Consulate/E-Embassy	The use of electronic means and ICTs to provide services to citizens living or travelling abroad (and aliens) in terms of information, consular support, applications, consultation/ participation and e-voting

E-Democracy Games	Games and simulations developed or implemented by public authorities, NGOs, policy centres or private actors to explain and introduce e-democracy, its processes and tools to citizens, shape the public sphere and foster knowledge of e-democracy
E-Democracy Webcasts	Live streaming / web casting of legislative / executive / judiciary meetings by public authorities in order to provide citizens and other interested stakeholders with information and transparency
E-Discussions	Discussions of issues of citizens' concern among citizens, public authorities and others using ICTs and other e-democracy tools in order to foster citizens' deliberation and participation in democracy
E-Initiatives	Using electronic and Internet tools to establish initiatives by citizens in order to participate in or influence political decision-making and engage in political agenda setting
E-Journalism	Using electronic and internet tools to publish information and news, report from political (party) events and event blogging by citizens and officials to provide unfiltered information
E-Justice	Using ICT in the conduct of justice, by all stakeholders of the judiciary, in order to increase efficiency and quality of public service in particular for citizens and business
E-Legislation	Using ICT for drafting, commenting upon, consulting, structuring, formatting, submitting, amending, voting and publishing of acts of elected assemblies
E-Ombudsman and Audit Institutions	Internet sites of ombudsman and audit institutions publishing information about public authorities' compliance with rules and especially providing citizens with a(n anonymous) possibility to issue a complaint electronically, thus establishing enhanced means of control
E-Parliament	The use of ICT by elected representative assemblies, their members and political and administrative staff, in the conduct of their tasks, actively involving its electorate /citizens
E-Party	The use of ICTs by political parties and corporations/associations to provide information about their activities, conventions and campaigns as well as participation opportunities online for its members and interested citizens
E-Petition	Electronic delivery of a protest or recommendation to a democratic institution about a public institution, a law, or to provide the public authorities or representatives with their opinion
E-Politician	Politicians electronically providing information about themselves, their work, decision-making and voting, and interacting and deliberating with their and others' public authorities as well as citizens (constituents) and the media.
E-Spatial Planning	Discussion and participation in urban planning in a neighbourhood context initiated by citizens, NGOs and/or public authorities making use of ICTs to foster local participation and find solutions on a local base
E-Voting	An electronic election or referendum that involves the use of electronic means in at least the casting of the vote, hereby enabling e.g. increasing accessibility for citizens and faster counting
Grassroots Interactivity C2C, C2G	Citizen initiated e-democracy projects among citizens or between citizens and public authorities to foster engagement and awareness regarding public issues and to influence political decisions
Information Management Tools	Innovative tools on public information, especially collecting and aggregating available information or news about situations and events, initiated by any stakeholder of democracy to facilitate information and decision-making
Participatory budgeting	Public participation in the budgeting process through electronic participatory tools and procedures hereby making the budgeting process more inclusive
Political Parties Internal E-Democracy	Political parties and associations using e-democracy tools for internal purposes, especially the selection of candidates, decision-making and internal party voting to include absent members and accelerate processes
Single Government Portal	One-stop government Internet websites supporting the citizens in dealing with public authorities by using electronic means - for communicating and transacting with public authorities

Vote Navigator	Using Internet based electronic social networks for political debate and initiatives, democratic participation and deliberation primarily among citizens, also with politicians and public authorities, closing the information gap and increasing participation, deliberation and transparency
General policies	**Description**
Combating Digital Illiteracy	Activities by public authorities and NGOs to combat digital illiteracy and digital divide, enabling all citizens to actively participate in (e-)democracy
E-Incentives	Activities by public authorities to provide financial, political or other rewards to citizens for their participation in e-democracy
E-Inclusion	Activities by public authorities and NGOs to promote inclusion in (e-)democracy especially of the unconnected, the elderly, minorities, other marginalised socio-economic groups and citizens with special needs
E-Training	Initiatives by public authorities and other actors for training in particular elected representatives, politicians and civil servants in using e-democracy methods
Government Interactivity with Citizens: G2C with C2C	Interaction by public authorities with electronic grassroots initiatives by either integrating them into the political process or providing such grassroots initiatives with administrative or financial support leading to an increased participation of citizens
Overcoming E-Obstacles	Activities to eliminate barriers of access and use of e-democracy, especially the previously elaborated issues of digital divide and digital illiteracy
Regulating E-Democracy	Provision of regulatory frameworks and regulations for e-democracy by public authorities, non-governmental authorities, providers or users in order to facilitate e-democracy and to secure the citizens' rights and interests

It is clear that this subject continuously evolves. The table above, therefore, which was drafted in 2009, does not mention some tools that have become very common in the last decade, such as e-citizen panels.

A.4. Why introducing e-Democracy?

There are four main reasons for introducing e-Democracy:
- to strengthen democracy according to the 12 Principles of Good Democratic governance and tackle democratic challenges relating to inclusivity and equality of participation;
- to strengthen cooperation between public authorities and communities, within the same country and across borders;
- to strengthen horizontal and vertical cooperation between the authorities;
- to enhance resilience in the face of emergencies.

To strengthen democracy in line with the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance and tackle democratic challenges

E-Democracy can support and strengthen democracy by ensuring that public decision-making better responds to the needs and expectations of the public; by empowering citizens and civil society in general actively engaging them in various forms of e-participation; by ensuring greater accountability of public institutions but also openness and transparency and last but not least greater efficiency and effectiveness.

E-Democracy is not the solution to all the shortcomings of democratic practice but it can help tackle challenges such as the declining interest in public and political life and the marginalisation of some groups, especially young people. If properly designed and used, it can help institutions engage with the public in a more inclusive, open, transparent and

accessible way. For this to happen, however, it is necessary to tackle inequalities also in the digital field as large number of people are currently excluded for reasons of low income and education, location, culture, trust and confidence levels or disability.

Checklist: Civil participation in democratic processes, civil engagement and empowerment through e-democracy tools

- Comprehensive, balanced, factual and verifiable information is provided by digital means in a simple and accessible manner to help the public understand problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions to current issues;
- citizens, groups of citizens and civil society at large, such as interest groups, corporations, associations and non-profit organisations, are engaged in public affairs through digital tools, so that they can exert influence and improve the quality and acceptability of policies, legislation and the outcome of democratic processes. This may take the forms of e-voting, e-petitions, online consultations, etc.
- there is regular and two-way communication between civil society and decision-makers, at different levels, with the latter reaching out to people to learn about their demands and needs and to react to their comments and questions;
- civil society has the opportunity to contribute to political agenda-setting, planning and decision-making, at different levels;
- digital tools are used to explain the rationale behind political decisions and initiatives.

Case studies: Civil participation in democratic processes, civil engagement and empowerment through e-democracy tools

ePartizipation, Austria

Austria has seen a number of efforts in e-participation initiatives during the last years. The project "ePartizipation, which was run by the Austrian Institute of Technologie (AIT) together with the University of Krems, the Austrian Printing Company "Österreichischen Staatsdruckerei GmbH", rubicon IT GmbH, the University of Vienna, and the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior from 2014 to 2016, looked into the creation of a single platform comprising many e-participation levels and activities for a broader target group. Researchers and practitioners worked on a platform demonstrator that integrates multiple online identification methods and offers activities on different levels of e-participation (however, not including elections).

Helsinki Kerrokantasi, Finland

"Your narrative" (Kerrokantasi) is an online service maintained by the City of Helsinki, where citizens can give their opinions and be heard on various local initiatives or projects already under way. The opinions are public and can be commented on by others. They are summarised for the use of local decision-makers.

Checklist: Openness and transparency

Public information should:
- be updated and verified for accuracy regularly;
- be accessible without specific procedures or technology;
- be presented in comprehensible language, simplifying institutional language and procedures, with clear structure and content;
- rely on interactive visualisation, images and graphics in such a way so as to make complicated content easier to understand;

- include channels to enable citizens and civil society at large to contribute to and participate in decision-making processes;
- ensure equal conditions for access to a neutral network which is essential to ensure equality and respect of human rights.

Case study: Openness and transparency

Transparency Programme initiative, Greece

Since 1 October 2010, all government institutions are obliged to upload their acts and decisions on the Internet with special attention to issues of national security and sensitive personal data. Each document is digitally signed and assigned a unique Internet Uploading Number (IUN) certifying that the decision has been uploaded at the "Transparency Portal". Following the latest legislative initiative (Law 4210/2013) of the Ministry of Administrative Reform and e-Governance, administrative acts and decisions are not valid unless published online.

The main objectives of the programme are:

- safeguarding transparency of government actions
- eliminating corruption by exposing it more easily when it takes place
- observing legality and good administration
- reinforcing citizens' constitutional rights, such as the participation in the Information Society
- enhancing and modernizing existing publication systems of administrative acts and decisions
- making of all administrative acts available in formats that are easy to access, navigate and comprehend, regardless of the citizen's knowledge level of the inner processes of the administration

Recent improvements - "DIAVGEIA II"

The main interventions include:
- Acts that are not published in the Official Gazette, are valid and get into force only if they are published on the Transparency Portal (Law 4210/2013)
- The uploaded document prevails over all other versions of the act (original documents in hard copy) (Law 4210/2013)
- Uploaded acts can be used by citizens and the other public authorities without validation, by solely referring to their unique number (Law 4210/2013).

Furthermore, under Law 4305/2014 all entities of the public sector is expected to publish on the Diavgeia web site detailed monthly data on the execution of their budgets per expense category. Also, entities that have received grants from the public sector are obliged to publish the relevant expenditure data.

Building the new enhanced Transparency Portal

The Ministry has implemented and launched in June 2014 the new Transparency Portal which focuses on:

- Easing accessibility and increasing user inclusion
- Ensuring efficient access to government information and documents through a new powerful portal search-mechanism.

- Building new online communication channels enabling greater user interaction, and engagement e.g. through the possibility of commenting on government and administrative acts.

How e-Democracy contributes to greater authorities' responsiveness

E-Democracy also serves the purposes of strengthening the public authorities' capacity to respond effectively and efficiently to demands and expectations coming from citizens and civil society in general, and to make better-informed policy decisions, namely:

- Follow-up to requests, questions, complaints or initiatives by stakeholders;
- Obtaining missing or complementary information while ensuring that the last decision is always made by people, not machines;
- Providing standardised responses and basic information to issues of a general nature or frequent questions by way of websites, automation of information provision (including responses using artificial intelligence such as bots);
- Allocating additional resources to more complex issues, leading to a more responsive administration.

How e-Democracy contributes to greater effectiveness and efficiency

- Eliminating constraints in terms of time and place, providing 24/7 as well as remote access;
- Providing strategic benefits in relation to national (as well as local /regional) and economic development;
- Leading to efficiency gains and cost savings in terms of communication, exchange of information, staff through online service delivery and technology-based work practices;
- Reducing the need for parallel systems gradually and as appropriate, so as to achieve greater efficiency without causing prejudice to those who do not have access to digital tools.

According to the European Commission, e-government is much more than the sum of digital tools. It involves rethinking organisations and processes and changing behaviour so that public services are delivered more efficiently to people at a lower cost. In Denmark, for example, electronic invoicing saves taxpayers €150 million and businesses €50 million a year. If introduced across the EU, annual savings could exceed €50 billion. In Italy alone, e-procurement systems cut over €3 billion in costs (2019).

Checklist: How to ensure that e-Democracy leads to inclusion and respect for human rights, including equality and non-discrimination

- Avoid discrimination on any grounds, foreseeing positive measures to bridge the digital gap, and by helping to overcome barriers to the participation of persons belonging to specific groups through digital as well as traditional democratic mechanisms;
- Ensure that technology is used and operates in such a manner that it is not discriminatory;
- Improve accessibility and broad citizen participation, including for people who would otherwise encounter difficulties or barriers in participating in the democratic decision-making process, in line with the Committee of Ministers' Guidelines on civil participation in political decision-making (2017);

- Narrow the digital divide by ensuring equal access and opportunities in the use of e-democracy; enhancing ability to use electronic tools (knowledge, e-skills, e-readiness); making e-democracy tools more available and accessible; and providing a combination of electronic and non-electronic approaches;
- Ensure that no special technology is needed to access e-democracy tools (normal internet access should be sufficient);
- Ensure that there are provisions made for people with special needs and that the content is designed to be suitable for the category it is intended for (including visualisation, translation etc.);
- Ensure the availability of e-democracy tools and applications in multilingual format;
- Continue to provide traditional channels of communication and participation.

Case studies: Inclusion and respect for human rights, including equality and non-discrimination

Participatory budgeting at local level, Fredrikstad, Norway

The municipality of Fredrikstad has since 2009 held three rounds of participatory budgeting, with a mixed use of e-Democracy tools. Projects have been created from time to time on case-by-case basis. The aim was to include especially the less politically active segments of society and had a special focus on young people, older persons and immigrants. The municipality decided on the topic and the size of the budget, allowing citizens to design different suggestions for the proposed project and vote electronically on the topic at this webpage. Users signed up by registering their email address. Participatory budgeting has also been done offline by inviting people to a central meeting place (circus tent in the square) hot food and asking people to take part in designing a town square.

Access for persons with disabilities, European Union

The Web Accessibility Directive (EU) 2016/2102, in force since 22 December 2016, provides people with disabilities with better access to the websites and mobile apps of public services. The rules laid down in the Directive reflect the Commission's ongoing work to build a social and inclusive European Union, where all Europeans can take a full and active part in the digital economy and society.

The Directive
- covers websites and apps of public sector bodies, with a limited number of exceptions (e.g. broadcasters, live streaming);
- refers to specific standards to make websites and mobile apps more accessible. Such standards require for instance that there should be a text description for images, or that users are able to interact with a website without using a mouse, which can be difficult for some people with disabilities;
- requires the publication of an accessibility statement for each website and mobile app, describing the level of accessibility and indicating any content that is not accessible;
- calls for a feedback mechanism which the users can use to flag accessibility problems or to ask for the information contained in a non-accessible content;
- expects regular monitoring of public sector websites and apps by Member States, and that they report on the results of the monitoring. These reports have to be communicated to the Commission and to be made public for the first time by 23 December 2021.

To strengthen cooperation between public authorities and communities, within

the same country and across borders

E-Democracy can strengthen cooperation between public authorities within the same State or at international level. It can be of particular benefit to regions that cut across national borders and encompass territorial political entities from different countries, to their institutions, and to persons living in different countries and sharing the same linguistic or cultural identity. Interoperability is a precondition for this happen.

Case study: Interoperability within the same country

Interoperability governance in Denmark

The main reference for the Danish National Interoperability Framework (NIF) is the online collaboration platform Digitalisér.dk. Denmark has taken on board the concept of interoperability in specifications to be followed when developing IT architecture and standards (Cross-Government cooperation). Interoperability governance is specifically foreseen in the public sector digital strategy. The strategy implies close collaboration between the authorities at all levels of government, from central government to regions and municipalities, with the following roles and responsibilities:

At national level:
- The Ministry of Finance is the main initiator of strategies and policies related to e-government and interoperability. It develops initiatives concerning administration, public leadership and digitisation to improve the efficiency of the public administration in general.
- The Agency for Digitisation contributes to accomplishing the political vision of the strategy and developing the relevant technology. The agency also coordinates the work and acts as the secretariat for the Steering Committee for joint Government cooperation (STS).
- The Ministry of Business and Growth develops the IT strategy for the private sector in Denmark. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Interior performs certain tasks regarding IT modernisation and digitisation-related issues.
- The steering committee (STS) consists of top representatives from central ministries and from the municipalities and regions. The committee performs preparatory work for major political decisions, including the yearly economic negotiations between central and local government and the digital strategy.

At regional and local level:
The steering committee (STS) has an important role connecting central and local government. The sub-national governments are closely connected to the central one through legislation. However, the legislations and ICT solutions leave space for local adaptation. Major ICT solutions consist of large e-government —building blocks, where each building block represents a delimited part of the digital procedure. The ICT building blocks offer the municipalities huge advantages. It becomes easier and cheaper to change the municipal services and switch supplier.

Case study: Cross-border interoperability

Estonia and Finland – Digital forerunners in cross-border cooperation

The article reproduced below was published in the Baltic Rim Economies (BRE) by the Pan-European Institute of Turku School of Economics in March 2019. At the time of writing, Iceland and the Faroe Islands have joined Estonia and Finland in using X-Road.

"The digital success stories and cross-border cooperation of Estonia and Finland trace back to the end of the 1990s. In Estonia, the X-Road data exchange layer solution project was initiated around 1998 and the X-Road software environment of Estonia, X-tee, was brought into use in 2001. The first digital ID cards were issued in Finland in December 1999 to Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen and in Estonia in February 2002 to President Arnold Rüütel and his spouse.

In August 2002, the Prime Ministers of Estonia and Finland, Paavo Lipponen and Siim Kallas, assigned a task to Jaak Jõeruut, a former Ambassador of Estonia to Finland, and Esko Ollila, a former banker, politician and long-time friend of Estonia, to evaluate the status of relations between the states just before Estonia would join the European Union in 2004. The evaluation resulted in a report entitled Finland and Estonia in the EU. The report mentions cross-border cooperation, information society and energy cooperation as common priorities for Estonia and Finland under the Northern Dimension policies of the EU.

In 2005, the Finnish Population Register Centre (VRK) and the Estonian Ministry of the Interior signed an agreement regarding the exchange of population register data between the countries. Since December 2005, VRK has provided data on Estonian citizens in the Finnish population register to the Estonian Ministry of the Interior, which in turn has provided data on Finnish citizens residing in Estonia since 2008.

In 2008, the prime ministers of Estonia and Finland assigned Jaakko Blomberg, a Finnish diplomat, and Gunnar Okk, Vice President of the Nordic Investment Bank, the task of investigating how Estonia and Finland could address the challenges of globalisation, while considering the goals of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Possibilities of cooperation between Finland and Estonia report was published in July 2008 with 55 recommendations emphasising education, science, technology and innovation. The other areas in the report included energy and information society, among others.

The report by Blomberg and Okk in 2008 included a vision of the countries' relations in 2030. According to the vision: "[In 2030] two thirds of Finns and Estonians use digital signature and digital authentication, and over 80 % of them use digital signature and digital authentication when doing business with public authorities and enterprises. All base registers of the public authorities of Finland and Estonia are implemented based on common principles that enable cross-border use."

How did the story continue from 2008 towards the vision of 2030? In 2013, the Prime Ministers of Estonia and Finland, Andrus Ansip and Jyrki Katainen, signed the Memorandum of Understanding initiating formal cooperation between the two states in respect of "developing and maintaining a software environment enabling secure connectivity, searches and data transfers between various governmental and private databases" – X-Road. This is considered to be the world's first digitally signed international agreement.

In 2013-2014, the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra played a key role in work leading to the implementation of X-Road in Finland, together with the Ministry of Finance of Finland and two experts from Estonia. Sitra funded two X-Road pilot projects in the cities of Espoo and Lahti. These pilot projects evaluated the feasibility of X-Road in producing social and health care services. In addition to nine municipalities involved in the evaluation of X-Road's feasibility in municipal use, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health also participated in the studies.

Even though X-Road was piloted in the social and health care sector in Finland, national information security legislation and policies limited the use of X-Road, especially in that sector. Estonia instead has built its information society upon X-Road and has very few limitations in its use. In 2016, Finland began renewing its information security legislation and policies, which will result in a new information management law entering into force in January 2020. This will probably develop new X-Road implementation cases in the social and health care sector in Finland.

The X-Road implementation project in Finland was kicked off in 2014 as part of the National Architecture for Digital Services (KaPa) programme. Suomi.fi Data Exchange Layer, the X-Road environment of Finland, was brought into use in November 2015.

In 2015, the Information System Authority of Estonia (RIA) and the Population Register Centre of Finland (VRK) concluded a cooperation agreement with the intention of formalising cooperation relating to X-Road. RIA and VRK were responsible for the coordination of X-Road core development, and a set of practices and guidelines were agreed to manage the cooperation.

Another important outcome of the collaboration between RIA and VRK was publishing the source code of X-Road core as open source under the MIT free software licence. The source code was published in two parts in 2015-2016 and it was made publicly available to anyone. Since then, dozens of countries around the world have implemented X-Road as their national data exchange layer solution. The cooperation between Estonia and Finland has had a global impact.

Estonia and Finland decided to deepen the cooperation by forming a joint organisation to administer the development of X-Road. The formation and cooperation agreement of the Nordic Institute for Interoperability Solutions (NIIS) was signed by ministers Urve Palo and Kai Mykkänen in Helsinki in March 2017, during a state visit of the President of the Republic of Estonia, H.E. Ms Kersti Kaljulaid and her spouse. The Memorandum of Association of NIIS was signed in June 2017 and the institute launched its operations in August 2017.

In June 2018, NIIS took over the core development of X-Road from RIA and VRK. The first step of the handover had been completed earlier in 2018 when NIIS took the responsibility of running the Working Group that comprises the platform for day-to-day coordination of the joint X-Road development. In June 2018 NIIS also took over the management of the source code of X-Road core.

There was extensive international media coverage of the Estonian–Finnish cross-border cooperation before, during and after the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (from July 2017 until the end of December 2017). Estonia, in cooperation with the President of the European Council and the European Commission, organised the Tallinn Digital Summit in September 2017 to bring together EU heads of state or government.

The governments of Estonia and Finland, led by Prime Ministers Jüri Ratas and Juha Sipilä, convened together for the first time in history in May 2018 in Tallinn, Estonia, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of both countries. They reached agreement at the anniversary meeting on many concrete measures by which digital connections between Estonia and Finland will be enhanced:

The governments decided to explore ways to bring the next digital service infrastructure components under joint development into NIIS, and to support the institute in efforts to find new member countries. The governments also decided to take all the necessary actions and ensure that the on-going data exchange projects will be completed in due time in 2018 and 2019, and the use-cases and roadmaps in the next data exchange areas will be identified by the end of 2018.

Finland's and Estonia's data exchange layers were connected to one another in February 2018, making it possible to easily transfer data over the Gulf of Finland between organisations that have joined the countries' national data exchange layers. Following the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the most popular cross-border use case appearing in international media was the e-prescription, which has often been reported to be based on X-Road, though this is not the case.

In 2019, the national business registers and tax boards in Estonia and Finland are moving towards cooperation that would allow the agencies to exchange data in a more accurate and efficient way by using X-Road trust federation between the countries. In European energy cooperation, digital solutions are being developed to build smart grids and to enable the

effective use of renewable energy. New cross-border services are being developed in both the public and private sectors.

Since the end of the 1990s Estonia has built a digital society from scratch, which has led to recognition as a digital pathfinder and resulted in modern digital services for its citizens. Finland with a long record in information technology and digital services leads the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) ranking in 2019. There are good reasons to believe the cross-border digital success story of Estonia and Finland will continue in cooperation with other Nordic and EU countries".

ISA[2], European Union

Digital interoperability refers to communication between devices, networks or services such that they can work effectively with each other. For the last two decades, the EU has supported programmes encouraging the digitalisation and cross-border interoperability of public administrations at all levels; these programmes have aimed to contribute to economic growth and government efficiency and to reduce administrative burdens and costs for citizens and businesses, particularly those operating outside their home countries. The current Programme on interoperability solutions for European public administration, businesses and citizens (ISA[2]) runs from 2016 to 2020, with financial resourcing amounting to 121 million euros.

To enhance resilience in the face of emergencies

Finally, e-Democracy has proved to be a strategic asset during the Covid-19 pandemic. A robust digital infrastructure making it possible to ensure continuity in the activities of key institutions and the provision of essential services to the public has been crucial for handling the crisis, a consideration that Council of Europe member States should keep in mind to enhance their emergency resilience and preparedness in general.

Case study: Digital infrastructure and Covid-19 response

Broadband connectivity, Greece

In the context of the response to Covid-19, an action plan established by the Ministry of Digital Governance in cooperation with the Directors in the telecommunications sector ensures the effectiveness of the telecommunication solutions used by public entities and by a great number of private sector companies, as well as by all the relevant communication services offered to citizens. Initiatives undertaken in this context include:

Tele-conference Platform "e-presence": The Ministry of Digital Governance provided this platform to enable all public entities to organise and hold online teleconferences of high quality offering online interactivity and web conferencing security;

Use of distance learning platforms offered for free by mobile phone networks: The mobile phone operators responded to the Ministry of Digital Governance initiative and offered free access to digital distance learning platforms;

Tele-working: The Ministry of Digital Governance ensured for all public entities a secure tele-working environment to up to 100,000 employees of the public administration, using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). The aim is to ensure operational continuity of crucial public administration services.

In relation to security of infrastructures and cyber security, the Ministry of Digital Governance has repeatedly issued guidelines for citizens, through official online sources and media, on the responsible use of telecommunication networks and services. The

Ministry also made recommendations on the safe access to the internet and on safe remote working. Guidance has been given to citizens on addressing disinformation and staying safe from online scams.

The Greek mobile and fixed telecommunications networks have been resilient and able to address the increased demand. The preliminary data collected from third parties show that the efficiency of the infrastructure has not been much affected. The bandwidth available for both mobile and fixed users was able to address the increased demand which was determined by means of data- intensive applications used for remote working and distance learning applications

A.5. Stakeholders

E-Democracy stakeholders are all individuals and institutions involved in the functioning of democracy including public authorities, NGOs, citizens and civil society at large, including academia and the business community.

Mutual respect between all actors should be the basis for honest interaction and mutual trust whilst all stakeholders should act in a fully transparent manner and be responsible and accountable for their actions as well as for the opinions they publicly express.

Checklist: The role of the authorities at all levels (national, regional and local)

Authorities at all levels should:
- take an active role to facilitate e-democracy and to innovate democratic processes by means of new technologies and platforms, including social and other digital media, and the creation of new public spaces;
- coordinate strategic action plans in line with established roadmaps for e-democracy;
- adopt policies, designed to promote the participation of citizens in public life, and adopt measures within their power, in particular with a view to improving the legal framework for participation;
- ensure that e-democracy applications are aligned and the distribution of tasks and priorities between central and local governments are clearly defined in line with the principle of subsidiarity;
- take into account the level of digital literacy of different groups and empower people through support for education, training and public information measures combining electronic and non-electronic approaches;
- set out objectives, processes and 'rules of engagement' of e-democracy initiatives in clear and simple language to ensure that all stakeholders concerned can provide input and be heard;
- provide clear explanations as regards proposals and solutions so that people can give their views, ask questions and have a real influence on how e-democracy is implemented;
- ensure access to ICT infrastructure and promote digital literacy to allow as many citizens as possible to benefit from e-democracy;
- define conditions which terms of service need to meet in relation to public e-democracy and e-governance initiatives;
- if possible, provide support for, engage and cooperate with e-democracy initiatives by civil society organisations and NGOs;
- promote Open Government initiatives, also in cooperation with civil society actors;
- encourage and fund research on e-democracy;
- identify the nature, type and limitations in terms of data and information to which academia and researchers should have access and the conditions for their use;

- include open source clauses when contracting for e-democracy applications, as open source software and applications provide open frameworks and hence the opportunity to share developments and maintenance costs.

Checklist: The role national (regional) authorities

National authorities, or as the case may be regional authorities, should:
- establish the regulatory framework and regulations for e-democracy in accordance with obligations and commitments in respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the principles governing the domestic organisation of democratic government;
- provide the framework for:
- transparency, responsiveness and accountability of government;
- developing and testing e-democracy initiatives at all levels;
- building trust and promoting understanding of new technologies; broad understanding of citizenry, encompassing persons and groups of persons permanently residing and integrated in a political entity, irrespective of their nationality;
- establish roadmaps for e-democracy providing planning advice and guidelines for the improvement of e-democracy tools and systems;
- ensure that national legislation and regulations enable local and regional authorities to pilot and/or employ a wide range of participation instruments, including e-democracy tools, in line with the Guidelines on civil participation in political decision-making and recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life, thus creating opportunities to identify areas for future improvement on the basis of lessons learned;
- promote dialogue and partnership between the central and local authorities and citizens, as well as for relations between authorities and institutions themselves;
- promote testing and piloting of e-democracy tools at local/regional level, where these are more likely to reflect people's immediate interests, expectations and needs and have a more direct link to decision-making;
- where applicable, facilitate e-democracy to promote and facilitate the work in areas concerned by cross-border cooperation or across greater regions and at transnational level.

Case studies: The role of national (regional) authorities

Spain*: The Higher Council for Electronic Government

The Higher Council for Electronic Government (Consejo Superior de Administración Electrónica- CSAE) is in charge of the preparation, design, development and implementation the ICT policy of the government, as well as for promotion of e-Government including electronic participation and transparency. It is supported by the Directorate General for Promotion of e-Government.

Slovak Republic: Slov –lex: legislative and information portal

Slov-lex is an online portal which provides professionals and general public with electronic access to applicable law in Slovakia and all the relevant information regarding law, and servers as a law–creating tool. Thanks to this tool, both transparency of developed legislation and participation of the civil society and general public is strengthened, as

relevant actors can be a part of the on-going legislative process during several stages of the law-making:

- Preliminary information: during the development of a legislative material, the creator is required to publish and information on the portal, stating the main aim of the legislation, brief overview, estimated time of creation and various options for contribution to the development process, along with contact details. Interested actors from civil society can contact the creator and cooperate on the development of the legislation;
- Commenting period: the general public along with all other governmental institutions and other relevant actors can comment on a draft legislation during a designated period via the Slov – lex portal, and actively shape the legislation. If a certain comment has a support of a significant number of persons (500), the creator of the legislation has to reason with the representatives on the proposal.

The portal also allows general public to hold a discussion on the legislation via the comments section, creating a channel between the general public and legislation creators.

Apart from being actively engaged, the portal serves as a collection of all applicable law, meaning that it enables public and civil society access the laws in one place easily from everywhere, without restrictions (the portal can be accessed without registration, for some of the features – e.g. commenting during the legislative procedure, registration is required). Thus, it strengthens access to information.

Checklist: The role of local (regional) authorities

Local authorities play a crucial role in the area of e-democracy because often they are the first ones to introduce and test new initiatives. Local authorities, in particular, or as the case may be also regional authorities, should:

- fully comply with Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 on the participation of citizens in local public life;
- strengthen local and regional regulations concerning the participation of citizens in local public life and set out practical arrangements for such participation, and to take any other measures within their power, to promote citizens' participation, including through e-democracy initiatives;
- develop action plans and pilot or implement e-democracy initiatives that are aligned with national e-democracy roadmaps;
- in line with the principle of subsidiarity, develop and test e-democracy tools in terms of agenda-setting, consultation and policy and decision making and provide feedback on lessons learned;
- align local e-democracy and e-government strategies and policy objectives with national plans, meeting the needs, demands and expectations of citizens
- promote digital literacy and access to new technologies by way of appropriate initiatives, including e-training, at local/regional level.

Case studies: The role of local (regional) authorities

WestBegroot, Netherlands

Every year, *Stadsdeel West*, a city district called 'West' in the city of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, makes plans for urban planning in the city district. These plans consist of

several priorities identified by the municipality for improving public spaces. These priorities are divided into categories which focus on specific theme's: currently these themes are 'Green and public spaces', 'Sustainability' and 'Diversity and Inclusivity'.

Whilst making preparations for 2018, the municipality of Amsterdam wanted to include the residents of district 'West' in the process of deciding on what the municipality should do that year. The city created a pilot-project called 'WestBegroot' and a website with the same name (https://westbegroot.amsterdam.nl/) which would serve as a platform for the residents to contribute and communicate with each other. The municipality sent letters to all the (and only the) residents of 'West' providing a personal account which residents could use to participate. On this platform, residents could start an initiative, vote on other initiatives, and discuss the initiatives with other residents.

'WestBegroot' has four main goals:

- To give local residents more direct involvement in the decision-making process, which in this case meant deciding how public urban planning funds would be spent (within certain limits).
- To better involve local residents in the democratic process, especially those residents who normally do not participate, or participate very little.
- To better involve local residents in local urban development.
- To use the knowledge and creativity of local residents to better serve the community

The digital participation method is also used for other projects in which the municipality wants to increase the participation of citizens in the democratic process. This method of using e-participation tools is being developed and put into practice by the Amsterdam innovation team 'OpenStad'.

OpenStad (which translates to 'open city') is an innovation team consisting of civil servants who work for the municipality of Amsterdam. The core team consists of a program manager, interaction designers and software developers, and varies in size depending on the number of projects they are working on.

The team does not only provide the digital tools needed, but designs the whole participation process, online as well as offline. The team works in four basic steps:

- Intake and defining the problem
- Assessment of the wants and needs of participants
- Matching the digital tools to the specific case in question
- Designing a case-specific tool which meets the wants and needs of participants.

Open Government Partnership, Serbia

Since 2012, the Republic of Serbia has been a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), an international multilateral initiative with the aim of providing support to member countries in building an open, transparent, efficient, accountable, citizen-oriented administration, by building the trust of the public, through cooperation with civil society organizations (hereinafter: the CSOs), empowering citizens' engagement in administration, combating corruption, providing access to information, use of new technologies, all with the purpose of achieving a more efficient and accountable work of public authorities.

The Republic of Serbia sees the membership in the OGP as the right road towards the implementation of the overall goal of the public administration reform in the Republic of Serbia which include providing high-quality services to citizens and corporate entities and creating a public administration that would foster economic stability and increase the

standard of living. The principles behind this initiative are completely aligned with the intention of the Government to build an administration on the grounds of "good governance" and "open administration" principles, i.e. to enable full implementation of the generally accepted principles of the rule of law and legal safety, publicity, accountability, economic efficiency and efficiency.

Since becoming a member, Republic of Serbia developed and adopted 3 action plans. The consultative process during developing, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of APs has been significantly improved, and Serbia adopted, implemented and planned to implement various commitments that will contribute to improvement of all OGP values (transparency, public accountability, public participation, as well as using new technologies and innovation in order to exchange information, improve public services and involve citizens in decision-making processes.

Various e-democracy initiatives in local government, Slovak Republic

The Electronic Council

The eGov-council service is used for the transparent publication of information on council members, council sessions, materials, resolutions, votes and other information on the activities of the self-government. The system implements electronic support for the fulfilment of the Code of the municipal establishment in Slovakia. The service enables support for the town hall and council members for preparing materials for council sessions, for voting about resolutions at the council session. Council members gain online access to public as well as private version of the materials for council sessions. Citizens can find information about programs of council sessions and materials. Accepted resolutions of council members are automatically published through this service.

The main objectives of this service are publicity and transparency of council and town hall activities, support and automation of administrative activities of the town hall and council members and to contribute to citizen engagement in public decisions.

Increasing transparency on a local level through participatory budgeting and the electronic administration of subsidies

The system "Hlas občanov" ("The voice of citizens") makes it possible to manage a participatory budget efficiently and to involve citizens into decision-making processes. The system "egrant.sk" makes it possible to manage the entire process of providing subsidies on a local level in a more efficient and transparent way. The main objectives of these systems are to increase efficiency and transparency of local subsidies provided by local governments and to increase people engagement on local issues through participatory budget planning. Both were initiated by the Civic association WellGiving.

SMS-info.eu

SMS-info.eu enables citizens to subscribe to updates in one or more areas of interest from any participating municipality. Updates are sent to an e-mail, SMS or a mobile application by municipalities and delivered within a few minutes independent on the number of subscribed citizens. Citizens are encouraged to send feedback by rating the usefulness of the update or commenting it. Citizens may also send their message to the municipality (suggestion, complaint etc.). The main objectives of this service are encouraging engagement of citizens, enabling citizen unformal direct contact to the municipality.

Announcement to the Mayor ("Odkaz pre starostu")

The service Announcement to the Mayor enables citizens to send a complaint or information including description, photo and GPS coordinates about a problem in the municipality directly to the town hall. Complaints are published instantly on the portal and mobile application. The town hall then publishes processing of the issue and the final solution on the portal and mobile application.

The main objectives of this service are encouraging engagement of citizens, enabling citizen direct contact to the town hall.

Checklist: The role of civil society

Individuals, alone or in association with others as civil society actors, are encouraged to actively participate to public life and to:

- respect the principles of deliberation – namely, rational debate among equals, where people publicly discuss, endorse and criticise one another's points of view in a thoughtful, respectful discussion of an issue and action to be taken on it;
- draw attention and give consideration to Internet access of different groups and in different areas;
- contribute to the development and testing of e-democracy initiatives and tools, in cooperation with authorities at local, regional or national level and seek to develop such initiatives and tools on their own account;
- contribute to awareness and acceptance of and training in e-democracy tools and associated technologies as well as provide training.

Case studies: The role of civil society

Civil Society Development Concept, Estonia

In Estonia, the Ministry of Interior has the overall responsibility for supporting the development of civil society. Together with other government agencies, it co-ordinates the implementation of the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept, a contract between the government and non-profit organizations, which establishes an equal partnership for achieving common goals.

The eCitizen Charter, Netherlands

The eCitizen Charter (BurgerServiceCode) is a quality standard for e-government in administration, written from the citizen's perspective. It consists of ten quality requirements in the fields of information exchange, service delivery and policy participation. The eCitizen Charter has been translated into 19 languages.

The revised Code of Good Practice for civil participation in the decision-making process

In October 2019, the Council of Europe Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations adopted the revised Code of Good Practice for civil participation in the decision-making process. Part of the chapter on cross-cutting tools and mechanisms is devoted to e-participation. The Code is complemented by a toolkit.

Checklist: The role of politicians and political parties

Politicians and political parties are encouraged to:
- use e-democracy tools in order to maintain and enhance their essential role as democracy intermediaries, connecting with citizens and the society they represent;
- use, and encourage other stakeholders such as civil society and individuals, digital technologies for the purposes of enhancing democratic debate;
- encourage e-activism and e-campaigning, so that stakeholders can voice their concerns and ideas, put forward initiatives, promote dialogue and debate with representatives and public authorities and, in the interest of democratic supervision, scrutinise officials and politicians in matters of public interest.

Case studies: The role of politicians and political parties

Consultations citoyennes, La République en Marche !, France

La République en Marche! (LaREM) is a French political and citizen movement launched on 6 April 2016 by Emmanuel Macron. Since its creation, the movement has promoted civil participation in public life through public consultations aimed at bringing back the experiences and reflections from the field. Such consultations and their results are accessible online on the webpage devoted to citizen consultations: https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/les-consultations-citoyennes/

Piattaforma Rousseau, Movimento 5 Stelle, Italy

Rousseau is the platform of direct democracy of the Five Star Movement in Italy. Its objectives are the management of the Five Star Movement in its various elective components (Italian and European parliaments, regional and municipal councils) and the participation of members of the platform in the life of the Five Star Movement through, for example, the writing of laws and voting for the choice of electoral lists or to settle positions within the Five Star Movement. As of July 2020, 306 consultations have taken place through the platform.

Online political crowdfunding, International IDEA

In a 2018 publication, International IDEA – the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – draws an overview of online political crowdfunding initiatives implemented by political parties, mainly in Europe.
Online political crowdfunding is the process whereby individuals donate small amounts of money to a political initiative, very often a political party, through digital means. As a tool, it can help political parties increase their resources by garnering support amongst disenfranchised groups; on the other hand, it opens a number of issues from the point of view of transparency and compliance with party funding regulations, which need to be taken into account by relevant legislation.

Checklist: The role of the private sector

The private sector, especially business companies who are involved in the design, development, sale, deployment, implementation and servicing of digital tools, including applications of artificial intelligence and automated decision-making, should act in accordance with the law, including standards on data protection, the right to private life

and other human rights. In addition, they should:

- give preference to open source standards and specifications and open source software to enhance openness, transparency and accountability and ensure interoperability, in particular when providing public services, contracting with or developing solutions for public authorities;
- implement due diligence or otherwise take all possible measures to avoid bias in e-democracy solutions and software;
- ensure standardisation and interoperability by using, where possible, standard and generally available IT components.

Internet intermediaries

Internet intermediaries play an increasingly important role in modern societies. Their actions influence the choices we make, the way we exercise our rights, and how we interact. The market dominance of some places them in control of principal modes of public communication. The Council of Europe has developed human rights-based guidelines to help member states address this challenge, set out in Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries.

Checklist: The role of academia

Academia can play a crucial role in carrying out independent, evidence-based and inter-disciplinary research and providing advice to other stakeholders, including the authorities, on issues such as the following:
- standard-setting in e-democracy;
- technological innovations which can be used in e-democracy and e-governance;
- the impact of digital technologies, including the role of computational means and algorithmic tools.

Case study: Collaboration between the authorities, academia and the public sector in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

Andrija, Croatia

Andrija is a digital assistant – a WhatsApp chatbot – who provides citizens with current information and recommendations on Covid-19 in a fast and efficient manner. The solution was designed by a team of experts headed by epidemiologist Prof. Branko Kolaric, with the technical and IT support of Mindsmiths, Neos and Oracle Croatia, private companies belonging to the Croatian Artificial Intelligence Association CroAI. All the Croatian companies involved decided to contribute free of charge in the joint national effort to tackle the pandemic.

Checklist: the role of media

All forms of media should be encouraged to:

- harness the opportunities offered by digital technology to present reliable, independent, factual and verifiable information;
- promote pluralism and a broad democratic debate in line with the principles of constructive journalism;

- separate information from commentary and have a strong commitment to context setting and analysis, to respect the citizens' right to form their own opinions and make political choices.

Public-service media should use electronic means to fulfil their essential role in educating people to become active and responsible citizens by providing a platform for public debate, presenting the diverse ideas and views of society, and disseminating information on democracy, democratic institutions and processes and democratic values.

Online media and electoral campaigns

Digital technologies have reshaped the ways in which people express their will through votes and representation and they have to a large extent changed political campaigning. The constant and simultaneous flux of information across multiple online platforms represents a huge challenge for the surveillance of behaviour and resources during political campaigns. Moreover, the anonymous creation of content hampers the identification and attribution of responsibilities for illegal online behaviours. The growing use of *bots* and *trolls* in social media, as well as the massive distribution of false information, seriously damage equality of arms in the electoral competition and allow for external actors to manipulate public discourse and the citizens' voting preferences. Furthermore, the algorithms that govern search engines and social media may foster a partial and sometimes illusory comprehension of politics and democracy. The Venice Commission and the Directorate of Information Society and Action against Crime of the Council of Europe have recently published a report exploring these aspects from the point of view of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

A.6. Artificial intelligence

An international, commonly agreed definition of artificial intelligence (AI) does not exist. For the purposes of the present Handbook, AI refers to systems that, on the basis of a large set of data, can perform various tasks with some degree of autonomy. This includes the use of algorithms to identify similarities and patterns, classify them and utilise the data for predictive purposes. AI also includes different types of automated learning.

Countries around the world and international organisations such as the European Union have understood the tremendous economic potential of AI, which is considered as a strategic technology.

The AI readiness index

In 2017, Oxford Insights created the world's first Government AI Readiness Index, to answer the question: *how well placed are national governments to take advantage of the benefits of AI in their operations and delivery of public services?* The results sought to capture the current capacity of governments to exploit the innovative potential of AI. As of the latest findings, relating to 2019, amongst the 20 best placed countries worldwide feature the following Council of Europe member States: United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Sweden, France, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Italy, Austria and Switzerland.

Council of Europe member States are launching national AI strategies or similar initiatives

to lay out their approach to the development and use of artificial intelligence, with a view to fully harness its benefits. These documents are meant to provide an overarching frame and guide the relevant AI stakeholders. They indicate clear willingness to use AI in the public sector with a view to delivering better public services and improving efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and coordination in the public administration. In fact, some member States see the public sector as being a leader in pushing for the development and uptake of AI.

Factsheet: AI Strategies in some Council of Europe member States		
Member State	**National AI Strategy**	**Date of Publication**
Austria	Artificial Intelligence Mission Austria 2030 (AIM AT 2030)	June 2019
Belgium	AI 4 Belgium	March 2019
Czech Republic	National Artificial Intelligence Strategy	May 2019
Denmark	National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence	March 2019
Estonia	Estonia's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2019-2021	May 2019
Finland	Leading the way into the era of artificial intelligence	June 2019
	AuroraAI development and implementation plan 2019-2023	March 2019
France	AI for Humanity	March 2018
	The Villani report	
Germany	Artificial Intelligence Strategy: AI Made in Germany	November 2018
	Key Points for a Strategy on Artificial Intelligence	July 2018
Italy	Artificial Intelligence at the Service of Citizens	March 2018
Lithuania	Lithuanian Artificial Intelligence Strategy: A vision of the future	April 2019
Luxembourg	Artificial Intelligence: a Strategic vision for Luxembourg	May 2019
Malta	Malta the Ultimate AI Launchpad: A Strategy and Vision for Artificial Intelligence in Malta 2030	October 2019
Netherlands	Strategic Action Plan for Artificial Intelligence	October 2019
Portugal	AI Portugal 2030	February 2019
Russian Federation	National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence by 2030	October 2019
Serbia	Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025	December 2019
Spain	RDI Strategy in Artificial Intelligence	March 2019
Sweden	National Approach to Artificial Intelligence	May 2018

| United Kingdom | AI Sector Deal | April 2018 |
| | A Guide to Using Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector | June 2019 |

AI is already being used by public administrations in many Council of Europe member States, for instance to assist civil servants at the preparatory stage in the context of automated decision-making[9] or to respond to citizens' enquiries through digital assistants.

Recently AI Watch - the European Commission knowledge service to monitor the development, uptake and impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Europe – has published the first mapping of the use of artificial intelligence in public services in EU Member States.[10] The report provides an inventory of 230 cases representing a unique reservoir of knowledge, from which to extract indications, emerging trends, and illustrative examples of current AI usage. The analysis of the initiatives included in the mapping shows a wide range of AI solutions applied to diverse government functions and policy areas.

Factsheet: Examples of the current use of AI in the public sector. *Source: AI Watch, Artificial Intelligence in Public Services, 2020*			
AI typology	**Description**	**Example**	**No. of cases reviewed**
Audio Processing	These AI applications are capable of detecting and recognizing sound, music and other audio inputs, including speech, thus enabling the recognition of voices and transcription of spoken words.	Corti in Denmark is used to process the audio of emergency calls in order to detect whether the caller could have a cardiac arrest	8
Chatbots, Intelligent Digital Assistants, Virtual Agents and Recommandation Systems	This AI typology includes virtualised assistants or online 'bots' currently used not only to provide generic advice but also behaviour related recommendations to users.	In Latvia, the Chatbot UNA is used to help answer frequently asked questions regarding the process of registering a company	52
Cognitive Robotics, Process Automation and Connected and Automated Vehicles	The common trait of these AI technologies is process automation, which can be achieved through robotized hardware or software	The use of self-driving snowploughs in an airport in Norway in order to improve the clearing of snow on runways.	16
Computer Vision and Identity Recognition	AI applications from this list category use some form of image, video or facial recognition to gain information on the external environment and/or the identity of specific persons or objects.	In Estonia, the SATIKAS system is capable of detecting mowed (or the lack of mowed) grasslands on satellite imagery	29
Expert and Rule-based Systems, Algorithmic Decision Making	The reason why these apparently distant AI developments are joined into a single application is their prevalent orientation to facilitate or fully automate decision making processes of potential relevance not only to the	Nursery child recruitment system used in Warsaw. The algorithm considers data provided by parents during the registration, calculates the score and automatically	29

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[9] See the presentation by Mr Paulo Savaget, Round Table on Artificial intelligence and the future of democracy, Strasbourg, 20 September 2019.
[10] AI Watch, Artificial Intelligence in Public Services, 2020

	private but also to the public sector.	assigns children into individual nurseries.	
AI-empowered Knowledge Management	The common element here is the underlying capacity of embedded AI to create a searchable collection of case descriptions, texts and other insights to be shared with experts for further analysis.	In the Slovak Republic, an AI system is used in the government to assist in the browsing and finding of relevant semantic data	12
Machine Learning, Deep Learning	While almost all the other categories of AI use some form of Machine Learning, this residual category refers to AI solutions which are not suitable for the other classifications.	In the Czech Republic, AI is used in social services to facilitate citizens to stay in their natural environment for as long as possible	17
Natural Language Processing, Text Mining and Speech Analytics	These AI applications are capable of recognising and analysing speech, written text and communicate back.	In Dublin, an AI system analyses citizen opinions in the Dublin Region for an overview of their most pressing concerns by analysing local twitter tweets with various algorithms.	19
Predictive Analytics, Simulation and Data Visualisation	These AI solutions learn from large datasets to identify patterns in the data that are consequently used to visualise, simulate or predict new configurations.	Since 2012, the Zurich City Police have been using software that predicts burglaries. Based on these predictions, police could be forwarded to check these areas and limit burglaries from happening.	37
Security Analytics and Threat Intelligence	These refer to AI systems which are tasked with analysing and monitoring security information and to prevent or detect malicious activities.	In the Norwegian National Security Authority a new system based on machine learning enables the automatic analysis of any malware detected to improve cybersecurity	11

The study concludes that *"governments across the EU are exploring the potential of AI use to improve policy design and evaluation, while reorganising the internal management of public administrations at all levels. Indeed, when used in a responsible way, the combination of new, large data sources with advanced machine learning algorithms could radically improve the operating methods of the public sector, thus paving the way to pro-active public service delivery models and relieving resource constrained organisations from mundane and repetitive tasks".*

CAHAI: Use of AI to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic

The Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI) has collected *a non-exhaustive overview of articles from the media and other available public sources on how AI* is being used as a tool to support the fight against the viral pandemic. The overview can be accessed here.

Its use by the authorities and public institutions in the exercise of their functions is not the only way in which AI has an impact on democracy and democratic governance. Artificial intelligence and machine-learning algorithms can also be used by other actors and stakeholders to influence democratic processes and outcomes. For instance, the recourse

to *bots* and *trolls* during electoral campaigns with a view to manipulating voter behaviour has received great attention by media, governments and organisations working in the area of democracy, including the Council of Europe, as indicated above. But machine-learning algorithms are also being used by political parties to refine their message through digital microtargeting, while a large share of voters rely on Voting Advice Applications.

Digital microtargeting by political parties

'The use of data to support political campaigns is common practice all over the world. Recently however, advances in technology have significantly changed the amount of information that can be gained from data, especially with regards to digital data from Internet use. By analysing specific datasets, political parties can achieve a highly detailed understanding of the behaviour, opinions and feelings of voters, allowing parties to cluster voters in complex groups. Such clusters can subsequently be targeted with online political advertisements that speak to their concerns and that are in line with their opinions. These online messages can only be seen by those voters in the targeted clusters. This is called digital microtargeting. The more detailed the available information on each voter, the more targeted and micro the political campaigns can become. Microtargeting promises to fundamentally change how a political party communicates with the electorate. At the same time, it brings new legal, ethical and political dimensions into play that ought to be understood and addressed. In particular, digital microtargeting brings campaigning to a whole new level of sophistication and can be used both positively and negatively' (extract from [Digital Microtargeting](#), International IDEA, 2018).

Voting Advice Applications

Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) are online tools that assist and inform voters by comparing their policy preferences with the political stances of parties or candidates running for office. The users of these tools mark their positions on a range of policy statements. After comparing the individual's answers to the positions of each party or candidate, the application generates a rank-ordered list or a graph indicating which party or candidate is located closest to the user's policy preferences. VAA have been proliferating in the last decade and are used by millions of voters in Europe. Examples of the most widely used VAA include [StemWijzer](#) in the Netherlands, [Smartvote](#) in Switzerland and [Wahl-O-Mat](#) in Germany. Originally embedded in citizenship education initiatives, they influence voter behaviour by motivating users to engage in further research about party policies, motivating participation in elections and affecting vote intentions (source: Diego Garzia and Stefan Marschall, [Voting Advice Applications](#), Oxford Research Encyclopedias, March 2019).

Increasingly, computational means and machine learning capabilities make it possible to infer intimate and detailed information about individuals from readily available data, to predict individuals' choices and influence their cognitive autonomy. They open a number of questions as regards the protection of fundamental principles such as transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and ethical conduct as well rights such as privacy and data protection, which are the very values and principles that e-Democracy tries to foster. Technological development also brings the concept of multi-stakeholders governance in the public sphere to a higher level, leading to a closer partnership between public authorities, IT companies and academia in the design and delivery of tools and services in the area of democratic governance.

The Council of Europe has shown awareness of these stakes. First, the Committee of

Ministers adopted a [Declaration on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes](#). Then, following the decision of the ministerial meeting in Helsinki in May 2019, the Committee of Ministers set up the Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI).[11]

CAHAI has a mandate to examine the feasibility and potential elements of a legal framework for the development, design and application of artificial intelligence, based on the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Its work should be finalised by the end of 2021.

In April 2020, the Committee of Ministers adopted a [Recommendation on the human rights implications of algorithmic systems](#), containing a set of guidelines for public and private actors to consider when designing, developing, and deploying algorithmic systems.

PART B: IMPLEMENTING E-DEMOCRACY

The implementation of e-Democracy initiatives, tools and policies requires:
*   planning, monitoring and evaluation,
*   and the existence of an appropriate legal framework.

It must be supported by adequate financial resources and es hand-in-hand with regular training of the civil service.

The impact of e-democracy depends on the democratic nature of the system, and the extent to which its institutions respect and safeguard fundamental human rights and minority rights and encourage democratic processes, including active political participation.

The following Indicative Guides appended to Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 can be used as references for the implementation of e-Democracy:

*   [No. 2: A roadmap approach to e-democracy](#)
*   [No. 3: A checklist for the introduction of e-democracy tools](#)
*   [No. 5: Evaluating e-democracy](#)

B.1. Planning for e-Democracy

The introduction, development and enhancement of e-Democracy initiatives, tools and policies should be well prepared, undertaken gradually, monitored for quality and regularly adjusted. This process requires:

*   gradual introduction both in scope (pilot projects) and nature (advisory/binding);
*   building on existing initiatives (for instance initiatives at the local level or originated from civil society);
*   ongoing evaluation and monitoring;
*   continuous adaptation and development of scope and tools, also with a view to adapting to the dynamically changing context.

In introducing e-Democracy tools, policies and mechanisms, it is necessary to define amongst other things:

*   priority areas;
*   aims and intended results of the tools, policies or mechanisms to be introduced;
*   priority areas;

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[11] [Webpage of the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence](#)

- the objectives and nature (top-down or bottom-up) of the participatory process and methods;
- expectations concerning the target audience and role of participants, the reason, relevance and purpose of participants' input;
- the resources required;
- assessment, evaluation and learning from the process.

E-Democracy requires a strategic approach, through the adoption of strategies, roadmaps and action plans. It also requires coordination between all levels of government: local, regional and national.

Checklist: Main elements of Strategies

- Spelling out the motivation for introducing e-Democracy;
- Including an assessment of the current situation with respect to e-Democracy;
- Identifying areas and processes which are suitable or would be improved if they were entirely or partially digitalised, clearly indicating the comparative advantage of using electronic solutions;
- Identifying the necessary legal, technical and non-technical environment to meet the relevant e-Democracy requirements;
- Defining review criteria for each stage of the roadmap as well as for periodic review and evaluation of the e-Democracy strategy and initiatives.

Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies, OECD

In 2014, the OECD Council adopted the Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies. Its purpose is to help governments adopt more strategic approaches for a use of technology that spurs more open, participatory and innovative governments. The principles set out in the Recommendation support a shift in culture within the public sector: from a use of technology to support better public sector operations to integrating strategic decisions on digital technologies in the shaping of overarching strategies and agendas for public sector reform and modernisation.

Case studies: e-Democracies strategies and initiatives

Federal e-government strategy, Austria

In order to de-bureaucratise life and work in Austria, the public administration is rapidly modernising and digitising. In addition to the expansion of broadband and 5G supply, the focus lies on the user-friendliness of digital applications for citizens and businesses. The Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs develops, promotes and supports state-of-the-art eGovernment to provide secure and fast management solutions. All administrative units are encouraged to use existing government data, streamline processes and promote mobility. The economy will thereby be supported by best practices from the broad field of digital transformation and digitalisation-friendly legal framework conditions. Furthermore appropriate financial support offers will be created to establish Austria as an attractive and digital business location.

Digitalisation Agency, Austria
The federal government has emphasised the importance of digital transformation for

industry, society and public administration and has given it high priority in the government programme. The Digitalisation Agency of the Federal Government was founded on 30 May 2018 and represents another important step to ensuring the success of Austria's digital transformation. The Agency especially focuses on the support of SMEs, implements targeted projects and provides expertise and know how in the fields of innovation, digitisation and networking. The established one-stop eGovernment platform help.gv.at has been expanded with further useful e-services (e.g. baby point, relocation, etc.) for citizens and relaunched under the new name oesterreich.gv.at. A dedicated app named "Digitales Amt" (Digital Office) became available on 19 March 2019. The oesterreich.gv.at App was launched in order to provide a single, mobile and easy to-use access for citizens to the most important administrative services.

Digital Switzerland Strategy

On 5 September 2019, the Federal Council adopted the "Digital Switzerland" strategy for the next 2 years. One of the main areas of the strategy concerns e-government and participation. Within the framework of this strategy the Federal Council will, among other things, establish a working group on the subject of artificial intelligence and support initiatives in relation to Smart Cities. In addition, the federal administration is intensifying dialogue with participants which are interested or involved, especially the cantons. The strategy is complemented by a glossary, an Action Plan and a Conference.

Local Digital Declaration, United Kingdom

The Local Digital Declaration was initiated in 2018 as a joint endeavour by the UK Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Government Digital Service (GDS), and a number of local authorities and sector bodies from across the UK. All local authorities and other organisations are invited to sign the Declaration. Over 150 local authorities have now signed the Local Digital Declaration and together form Local Digital, a growing community of organisations working together with a shared vision to deliver more user-friendly, cost-effective local public services through open, collaborative and reusable work.

Checklist: Main elements of Roadmaps

- Establishing a common terminology;
- Collecting examples of good practice;
- Defining the building blocks of the roadmap (the achievement of specific objectives/results);
- Signposting the main stages of development along the roadmap including qualitative indicators;
- Establishing a clear timeline;
- Including provisions to ensure sustainability and continuity in financial and political terms;
- Identifying risks;
- Identifying enabling factors such as the introduction/amendment of legislation; the organisation of training for civil servants; promoting awareness and information, etc.

Checklist: Main elements of Action plans

On the basis of strategies and roadmaps, action plans should clearly set out the core elements of specific initiatives, including:

- clear definition of the e-Democracy initiative to be adopted and the authorities and stakeholders involved;
- creation of inclusive groups involving stakeholders in planning;
- key e-Democracy areas to be addressed;
- when they are to be initiated;
- the goals and objectives to be achieved;
- dedicated platforms/websites;
- the use of pilot or testing phases;
- identification of the target audience (businesses, individuals, etc.);
- e-identification and security measures;
- how these might evolve and relate to other e-democracy initiatives;
- multi-disciplinary co-operation needed;
- supporting measures and policies required;
- monitoring, reporting, evaluation criteria;
- availability and accessibility;
- traditional democratic processes to be run in parallel.

Action plans should also clarify:

- who has overall responsibility;
- partners/stakeholders and key actors involved;
- what resources are available;
- what is a realistic timetable to be met;
- what is the political support for the initiative;
- the focus of the initiative, including topic, geographical scope and target group;
- challenges, opportunities and achievements to be realised;
- constraints and risks which may impact on the outcomes of the initiative.

As regards sourcing of technical solutions and upgrading previous software, action plans should:

- ensure access to the technical knowledge required for evaluating the possible need for adopting new hardware or software;
- identify technical platforms and solutions that meet the requirements of the objectives and target audience (including the possible use of mobile computing applications);
- identify whether e-identification or e-signatures are required;
- identify possible needs for automated assistance or feedback to stakeholders;
- give preference to open source solutions and software, avoiding the use of proprietary software where requirements of public administration allow this;
- recognise the need for good co-operation between ICT experts and persons with knowledge of participatory processes – in procurement both expertise is needed;
- give preference to standardising e-democracy/e-government solutions;
- pay particular attention to flexibility and avoid vendor lock-in;
- ensure that Terms of Service meet requirements in terms of human rights.

Case study: Action Plans

Digital Switzerland Action Plan

The implementation activities of the "Digital Switzerland" strategy within the Federal Administration are published in an Action Plan that is updated every year and fleshes out the strategy's orientation. The Action Plan also lists important national projects of actors outside the federal government (e.g. research initiatives, technology projects and digitalisation).

European eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020, European Union

The eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 proposes an ambitious vision to make public administrations and public institutions in the European Union open, efficient and inclusive, providing borderless, personalised, user-friendly, end-to-end digital public services to all citizens and businesses in the EU. It identifies three policy priorities: modernising public administrations using key digital enablers (for example technical building blocks such as CEF DSIs like eID, eSignature, eDelivery, etc.); enabling mobility of citizens and businesses by cross-border interoperability; facilitating digital interaction between administrations and citizens/businesses for high-quality public services.

The initiatives to be launched as part of this Action Plan should observe the following underlying principles:

- Digital by default: public administrations should deliver services digitally (including machine readable information) as the preferred option (while still keeping other channels open for those who are disconnected by choice or necessity). In addition, public services should be delivered through a single contact point or a one-stop-shop and via different channels;
- Once only principle: public administrations should ensure that citizens and businesses supply the same information only once to a public administration. Public administration offices take action if permitted to internally re-use this data, in due respect of data protection rules, so that no additional burden falls on citizens and businesses;
- Inclusiveness and accessibility: public administrations should design digital public services that are inclusive by default and cater for different needs such as those of the elderly and people with disabilities;
- Openness and transparency: public administrations should share information and data between themselves and enable citizens and businesses to access control and correct their own data; enable users to monitor administrative processes that involve them; engage with and open up to stakeholders (such as businesses, researchers and non-profit organisations) in the design and delivery of services;
- Cross-border by default: public administrations should make relevant digital public services available across borders and prevent further fragmentation to arise, thereby facilitating mobility within the Single Market;
- Interoperability by default: public services should be designed to work seamlessly across the Single Market and across organisational silos, relying on the free movement of data and digital services in the European Union;
- Trustworthiness and Security: All initiatives should go beyond the mere compliance with the legal framework on personal data protection and privacy, and IT security, by integrating those elements in the design phase. These are important pre-conditions for increasing trust in and take-up of digital services.

Risk assessment and management

Risks in relation to the use of digital technologies need to be carefully assessed against international standards and guidelines, not least in relation to the democratic process.

Challenges, barriers and risks to be taken into consideration may be political, legal, organisational, technological, economic, financial, social or cultural relating to:

- processes under the control of the authorities, and
- processes related to public-private partnerships or outsourcing contracts for the provision of services (e.g. handling/processing personal data on behalf of public authorities);
- willingness and ability of citizens and civil society at large to engage in democracy by electronic means and have confidence in those means.

Checklist: Risks to be identified, assessed and managed when implementing e-Democracy

Organisational risks

- differences in understanding the objectives of the e-Democracy initiative;
- availability of resources in terms of finance, human resources and the times-scale provided;
- organisational constraints which may include the need for shared ownership among different departments or stakeholders and the need to develop a process-oriented approach;
- structural limitations;
- continuity as a result of lack of coordination, management shortcomings or failures and definition of roles and responsibilities including possible changes to policy (e.g. change of government, elections);
- availability of resources in terms of finance, human resources and the times-scale provided
- organisational constraints which may include the need for shared ownership among different departments or stakeholders and the need to develop a process-oriented approach;
- structural limitations; and
- continuity as a result of lack of coordination, management shortcomings or failures and definition of roles and responsibilities including possible changes to policy (e.g. change of government, elections)

Technological risks

- access to ICT and digital infrastructure, tools and applications
- reliability and security concerning documents, ICT-systems, networks and the Internet;
- characteristics of technical platforms and environments;
- transparency, bias or unintended consequences in the use of algorithms or underlying data sets;
- technical measures for the protection of data, privacy, processing of personal and non-personal data.

Data protection and privacy challenges

- real as well as perceived risks to data protection and privacy of data in both traditional and digital format should be assessed;
- data protection legislation and implementing structures to be taken into account;
- data protection training and awareness raising measures;
- the role of the independent data protection authority.

Digital divide

The risk of exclusion as a result of lack of access to technology, basic skills in using technology or understanding the functioning of digital technologies preventing users from being able to fully utilise and exploit e-democracy tools requires thorough assessment and appropriate remedies. Differential availability and access to technology and infrastructure in different regions, urban areas and among different population groups also needs to be assessed.

Risk assessment is also required in terms of user awareness in relation to how data and information are gathered, treated and processed and general understanding of how digital technologies can influence the manner in which information is received and imparted, influencing how people form opinions.

Digital and democratic literacy is of particular benefit in relation to addressing perceived risks.

External risks

External risks include standard environmental risks as well as natural events and hazards in relation to infrastructure and possible attempts by third parties to influence or manipulate both traditional and digital democratic procedures and processes by digital means or otherwise. The latter concern voting, referendums, petitions and the wider areas of information provision, deliberation and participation.

Review and evaluation

In order to ensure that objectives are met, regular review, evaluation and assessment are required at specific intervals both during implementation and thereafter.

E-democracy tools and processes require periodic review and both quantitative and qualitative evaluation, preferably by an independent party, of elements such as:

- content, in order to ensure that information is up-to-date and accessible;
- accessibility and ease of use for all, in particular categories of the public who may be underrepresented or who have greater difficulties of access;
- indicators to measure the quality of e-democracy services and tools.

Checklist: Evaluation and assessment

As regards quality, evaluation should include:

- clear pre-defined evaluation criteria including values/norms/expectations taking into consideration political culture and participative behaviour;
- *ex ante* and *ex post* diagnosis in relation to traditional democratic/participative processes;
- comparative analysis of the quality of democracy including the manner initiatives contribute to democracy/democratic governance, inclusiveness, as well as intended and unintended effects;
- quality of governance;
- quality of participation (impact on government practice and institutional and political decision-making and policy implementation including whether it *extends* (from a quantitative point of view) and *enriches* (from a qualitative point of view) participation, which requires a flexible combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The evaluation of the quality of e-democracy in terms of contribution to democratic objectives sought by governments and citizens should cover the following dimensions:

- type of engagement (information-consultation-active participation);
- stage in decision-making;
- actors involved;
- technologies used;
- rules of engagement;
- duration and sustainability;
- accessibility;

- resources and promotion;
- evaluation and outcomes;
- critical success factors (to be agreed on before starting the initiative);
- gender aspects and gender mainstreaming.

On the basis of both qualitative and quantitative data, e-democracy should be assessed in terms of:

- usefulness;
- usability;
- social acceptability.

B.2. Legal framework

The overall legal framework

In line with Recommendation (2009)1, e-Democracy needs to be embedded in balanced, citizen-oriented rules and regulatory frameworks, including regulations adopted by public authorities, co-regulation and self-regulation.

Recourse to digital technologies may require modifications to the existing legislative and regulatory framework, or new legislation being drawn up.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 further specifies that *"Rules and regulations governing e-democracy should promote democracy and the rule of law, in particular by strengthening the involvement and participation of citizens in national, regional and local public life and decision-making processes, encouraging citizen initiatives, and improving public administration and services by making them more accessible, responsive, user oriented, transparent, efficient and cost-effective, thus contributing to the economic, social and cultural vitality of society."*

Key considerations include:

- critical analysis of existing legislation to assess whether its aims and objectives are suited for the e-Democracy context;
- trying to avoid specialised legislation where possible in order not to create parallel systems;
- data protection legislation;
- regulation of digital identities, digital signatures and e-identification.

Checklist: Minimum requirements for legislation and regulation

The legislative and regulatory framework needs to ensure respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including freedom of, and access to, information, in full compliance with international standards, through:

- support for the democratic roles of intermediaries between citizens and the state, such as democratic institutions, politicians and the media;
- institutional openness, respectful of informed participation and real time transparency for all digital forms of interaction
- access to information in line with the requirements set out in the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (ETS No. 205);
- data protection in line with the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108); the Protocol amending the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CETS No. 223), the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official

Documents (ETS No. 205) and where applicable the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union;
- responsibility and accountability for the functioning, performance, security and reliability of technology and tools;
- principles governing sustainability and continuity safeguarding fundamentals of sound financial management;
- consideration of protective frameworks related to data that go beyond current notions of personal data protection and privacy.

Case study: The overall legal framework

eGovernment Act, Austria

The eGovernment Act, the centrepiece of Austrian eGovernment law, entered into force on 1 March 2004 and was last amended on 27 December 2018. This Act is the core of Austrian laws on eGovernment. It serves as the legal basis for eGovernment instruments and components. Many mechanisms such as the Citizen Card, sector-specific personal identifiers and electronic delivery are also able to be put to use in the private sector.

The most important principles of eGovernment law are:
- Freedom of choice for users in selecting the means of communication when contacting public authorities;
- Security and improved legal protection provided by appropriate technical measures such as the Citizen Card;
Unhindered access for people with special needs to public administration information and services.

Amendments to the Act were made on 17 May 2018 and 27 December 2018 regarding the GDPR and new responsibilities. They were made primarily to adapt the national legislation to the new terminology used in the GDPR. Furthermore, the responsibility for the Source-PIN Register Authority changed from the Austrian Data Protection Authority to the Federal Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs.

Citizen Participation Regional Act, Comunidad Valenciana, Spain

Spain has a highly decentralised model of government and regions have extensive legislative powers. To promote electronic participation, the Valencia Regional Government has adopted a Citizen Participation Regional Act (Ley de la Comunidad Valenciana 11/2008). This includes an electronic channel among the means of participation that citizens have at their disposal. The regional government of the Canary Islands is undertaking a similar regional Act for parliamentary approval.

Critical analysis of existing legislation

Analysis of existing legislation should cover:
- the impact of digital technology and e-Democracy tools;
- obstacles to the use of digital tools (for example the need to be present in person);
- requirements and purpose for use of specific formats or types of documents or other specific requirements as to the form, structure, and so forth and whether these apply to the digital environment;
- whether it allows for enough flexibility;
- privacy and data protection in line with European standards.

E-identification

Specific legislation may be required in relation to e-identification and digital signatures and digital identities may be appropriate in relation to avoid questioning of the legal validity of any electronic democracy tool. Thus, for example, legislation should stipulate the type and nature of electronic identification and signatures that are recognised and define so-called qualified digital signatures. Where possible the type of identification and signature (e-ID) for e-Democracy should be the same as for e-governance.

Specialised legislation

Specialised legislation should be limited in order to avoid creating parallel systems. Many risks and issues of e-democracy are not specific to it and may be addressed in an adequate manner in existing legislation. However, amendments or further clarification of such legislation may be appropriate. Such areas may include access to information, consultation, elections, petitioning, referenda, preservation, disposal and destruction of materials and records.

For example, in the area of artificial intelligence, special legislation may not be required per se, as there are presumptions by law about responsibility and liability for the activities performed by or with the help of machines. Additional regulations or legislation may be helpful to facilitate application of existing legal principles in relation to new technologies, and to clearly define accountability in relation to the criteria and transparency of the decision-making process and for decisions taken (e.g. requirements for a human to take or verify final decisions). It may also contribute to transparency of technology applications used for decision-making or a more transparent decision-making process. Where full transparency is not possible, a policy decision may be required on whether or not the technology can be used.

Case studies: Critical analysis of existing legislation

E-voting, Estonia

The Estonian e-voting system was examined by the Supreme Court in 2005,[12] following a complaint by the President in his role of examining constitutionality of legislation. The case centred on the principle of one person – one vote and if the e-voting ensured this. The Court found that there was nothing in the system that compromised the principle of 'one person - one vote'. Thus, the Supreme Court ruled that the system of e-voting appropriately balanced all electoral principles of the constitution.[13]

The Election Act, Norway

The Norwegian Election Act allows for the possibility to test other ways to conduct elections by way of "pilot schemes in which elections under this Act are conducted in other ways than those that follow from this Act" – as long as the basic principles are not violated, including direct, secret and free suffrage. Provided those principles are ensured, e-voting can be used as a supplement to

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[12] Judgment of the Constitutional Review Chamber of the Supreme Court number 3-4-1-13-05, Petition of the President of the Republic to declare the Local Government Council Election Act Amendment Act, passed by the
Riigikogu on 28 June 2005, unconstitutional," 1 September 2005, http://www.nc.ee/?id=823
[13] *Ibid.*

traditional paper-based voting methods. Specific rules can be made about the period and mechanisms.

Petitions to the Scottish Parliament, United Kingdom

As regards petitions, those submitted to the Scottish Parliament for example, as they are not legally binding, rigorous security checking at the level that would be required for internet voting is not considered necessary. Instead e-petitioners performs an internal confidence rating check to assess how secure each name and address is. The actual rating depends on a number of factors, such as the IP-address and how often the same IP address has been used to sign the petition. These confidence ratings are closely examined prior to submission of the petition to check for any irregularities. The system also automatically removes any duplicate names and addresses. The legal situation in terms of checks is the same as for paper signatures. To some extent however, technology allows for stricter controls than would be possible with manual checks of signatures and addresses.

B.3. E-Democracy in practice

E-Democracy can be implemented through different tools, policies and mechanisms. This section provides a description and case studies of the most frequently used, such as:

- e-voting (e-elections and e-referendums) and the use of new technologies to support elections and referendums;
- other forms of e-participation and e-consultation, including e-petitions.

This section also broaches e-Democracy tools and processes that have come in use during the Covid-19 emergency.

E-voting and use of digital technologies to support elections and referendums

To date, the Council of Europe is the only international organisation to have set standards in the area of e-voting, which is defined as the use of electronic means to cast and/or count a vote.

The specific reference text is CM/Rec(2017)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on standards for e-voting, which is supplemented by Guidelines on its implementation and accompanied by an Explanatory Memorandum. They were drafted by the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Legal, Operational and Technical Standards for E-Voting (CAHVE), consisting of government-appointed representatives from Council of Europe members States and organisations with direct experience or specialised knowledge on e-voting. The mandate of the CAHVE was to revise a set of previous Council of Europe reference texts on the basis of recent developments.[14]

The right to vote lies at the foundations of democracy and, as a result, all voting channels, including e-voting, shall comply with the principles and good practices of democratic

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[14] These texts, which have now been superseded by CM/Rec(2017)5 and its Guidelines, included Recommendation Rec(2004)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on legal, operational and technical standards for e-voting, the Guidelines for developing processes that confirm compliance with prescribed requirements and standards (Certification of e-voting systems) and the Guidelines on transparency of e-enabled elections.

elections and referendums and be secure, reliable, efficient, technically robust, open to independent verification and easily accessible to voters.

Purposes of e-voting

According to CM/Rec(2017)5 on Standards for e-voting, the purposes of e-voting are:

- enabling voters to cast their votes from a place other than the polling station in their voting district;
- facilitating the casting of the vote by the voter;
- facilitating the participation in elections and referendums of citizens entitled to vote and residing or staying abroad;
- widening access to the voting process for voters with disabilities or those having other difficulties in being physically present at a polling station and using the devices available there;
- increasing voter turnout by providing additional voting channels;
- bringing voting in line with new developments in society and the increasing use of new technologies as a medium for communication and civic engagement in pursuit of democracy;
- reducing, over time, the overall cost to the electoral authorities of conducting elections or referendums;
- delivering voting results reliably and more quickly;
- providing the electorate with a better service, by offering a variety of voting channels.

CM/Rec(2017)5 does not encourage Council of Europe member States to introduce e-voting. By contrast, it sets out standards and recommends safeguards with which Council of Europe member States should comply when they introduce, revise or update legislation on e-voting.

The Guidelines supplementing the Recommendation are designed for use in elections and referendums at all tiers of governance. They are not intended as a strict set of rules for member States, imposing a particular way of implementing the provisions of the updated recommendation but are intended to provide guidance and to support member States on the subject.

Key principles set out in CM/Rec(2017)5 on Standards for e-voting

- Universal suffrage;
- Equal suffrage;
- Free suffrage;
- Secrecy of the vote;
- Transparency and election observation
- Regulatory and organisational requirements;
- Accountability
- System reliability and security

Security risks

Trust is a central element to any democratic process, including voting. The risks described earlier in this Handbook in relation to e-Democracy apply also to electronic voting and have led some Council of Europe member States to discontinue this tool or to reject its use. In this Guidance note, the Cybercrime Convention Committee provides guidance and clarification as regards the applicability of the Budapest Convention (ETS No. 185) to various forms of interference with elections through malicious cyber activities.

Case studies: E-voting

Electronic voting, Estonia

Estonia is the only country in the world to have online voting in all elections, since 2005 (as a way of voting in addition to the traditional vote). Electronic voting (Internet voting) is based on a universal General Framework for Electronic Voting that can be applied in different types of elections. Voting is based on the electronic identity linked to the ID card which every Estonian citizen and resident has. The voting system is an envelope-based system. Election observers can attend the counting and courses are arranged to help understand the system. At the inception of the system, the Estonian Supreme Court examined the idea of on-line voting from the perspective of free elections, i.e. protection from pressure. The risk is mitigated by the fact that a person can change the vote cast electronically and only the last vote will be counted. The Court found that although the system in this respect differs from traditional voting, it is in line with all relevant rules and principles for elections.

The initiative did not encounter any systematic problem but constant development is needed, as well as work on transparency and auditability to guarantee public trust in the solution. The electorate has embraced this polling method, especially Estonians living abroad, but there is a considerable user-contingency in Estonia as well. Alternative polling methods have been maintained.

E-referendum, Iceland

Iceland permits electronic referendums in some cases. Residents can, via a petition, demand a residents' referendum on specific issues or matters under consideration by the municipal administration council. Likewise, the council can on its own announce a residents' referendum. In transitional provisions approved by the Icelandic Parliament in March 2013, it is stated that such referendums may, with specific authorisation from the Minister of the Interior, be held electronically online with the use of an electronic electoral register. The stated purpose of the transitional provisions of this kind is to test and try new technologies for residents' referendums. The project would also be a precursor to still larger projects in this field.

While a limited number of Council of Europe member States have introduced e-voting, many of them use digital technologies with a view to enhancing the electoral process.

Case studies: Digital technologies in the electoral process

The New Central Electoral Register, Austria

Austria has a unified centralized voter register ("Zentrales Wählerregister - ZeWaeR") and online participation in public initiatives since 2018. The development took place as follows:

New Central Electoral Register went into operation on 1/1/2018
2,096 municipalities continue to maintain local voter registers and lists but all data stored in a centralized platform
Data quality improved, centralised "data cleaning" possible
Nation-wide overview of issued voting cards possible
Public initiatives can be supported in any municipality (not only main residence) and online since 1/1/2018

Room for further extensions (with legal amendments)

Public initiatives online can be taken by using smart card or mobile phone signature solution.
Paragraph 1 of the E-Government Division Allimitation Ordinance (BGBl. II No. 289/2004) stipulates that any data application by a public authority client must be assigned to a public sphere of activity within the meaning of Section 9(2) of the E-Government Act if, in the context of this application, area-specific personal identifiers are to be used. The use of this online service via this portal by registering with a citizen card function (including the mobile phone signature) is only possible by agreeing to the calculation of area-specific personal identifiers, as this is the only way to achieve a clear electronic identification.

The first nationwide use of Central Electoral Register during elections took place with the framework of the European elections on 26 May 2019 (various technical features added, including tool to change precinct addresses/polling station information online). Further extensions of Central Electoral Register are possible (e.g. also usable by provinces for their systems), Increasing popularity of public initiatives (particularly with the new "e-participation tool").

Use of online platform for public initiatives. The most recent public signing phase for five public initiatives took place from 22 to 29 June 2020. The e-collecting feature was widely used.

Modernisation of the electoral register, Ireland

Ireland is currently developing a project for the modernisation of the electoral register. The proposals include the provision of online registration as an optional alternative to paper-based registration, as well as: the introduction of a simplified registration process; a move to a rolling register; a reduction in the number of application forms; and the move from household-based to individual registration. Verification of identity through the possible use of Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSNs) is also proposed.

A Government decision in March 2017 accepted in principle the main recommendation in the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution that citizens outside the State, including citizens resident in Northern Ireland, should have the right to vote at presidential elections and that a referendum be held to put this to the people. In this context, the Government determined that work should commence on modernisation of the voter registration process to effect improvements in the registration of voters, which would also facilitate the registration of voters resident outside the State in the event that the referendum be passed.

In recent years a range of potential improvements to facilitate administration of, and public engagement with, the register have been identified by a number of reports including by the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht in its report of the consultation on the proposed Electoral Commission in 2016.

While the current electoral registration system has the confidence of the electorate and has served the country well, a range of potential improvements to facilitate administration of, and public engagement with, the register have been identified.

Improvements include:

- *Enabling a better service to the public:* Making registration easier, by simplifying and streamlining processes, combined with a move to individual rather than household

registration, will enable individuals to take greater responsibility for their own registration and ensuring their information is up to date. Optional online registration and secure self-service could further facilitate registration and data management.

- *Modernisation of the administration of the register:* A single central electoral register with unique identifiers would bring together the existing 31 registers into a single register in a modern, secure database. A rolling register/continuous registration would create a single live register all year round with a single cut off in advance of an electoral event.

- *Maintaining and enhancing the integrity of the register*: Identity verification, including through the possible use of PPSNs, could enhance the integrity of the register and minimise duplicate entries or erroneous amendments. The potential of data sharing as a means of maintaining the register in the future will also be considered

In parallel to the work of the Department four Dublin based local authorities have developed their own online registration system, voter.ie. This system was rolled out in a pilot phase during recent electoral events, which provided the option of online registration and amendment of details. The outcome of the pilot of the voter.ie platform is also being considered as part of the wider modernisation project

Single Electoral Roll, Serbia

The Single Electoral Roll is a public document where single records are kept of nationals of the Republic of Serbia eligible to vote. *The Single Electoral Roll is kept as an electronic database* and is updated on a regular basis by municipal and city administrations as a delegated duty under the Law on the Single Electoral Roll. Updating of the Electoral Roll includes changes made ex officio or on request from citizens. Any change in the Electoral Roll is based on a relevant decision, namely a decision on registration, deletion or change, supplementation or correction of a fact relating to a voter on the Electoral Roll. Registration with the Electoral Roll is prerequisite for the exercise of the right to vote and each voter can be registered with the Electoral Roll only once.

 The following persons are registered with the Electoral Roll:
– Nationals of the Republic of Serbia of legal age with the capacity to contract, i.e. persons with the right to vote – according to their place of residence; at voter's request, his/her temporary residence address in the country may also be recorded;
– Voters who reside abroad – according to their most recent place of residence before moving abroad or according to the most recent place of residence of one of their parents; in this case, the voter's temporary residence address abroad must also be recorded;
– Internally displaced persons – according to the place where they are registered as internally displaced persons.

Every citizen has the right to consult the Electoral Roll in order to verify their personal information. The Electoral Roll may be consulted in person at the municipal or city administration of the voter's residence or electronically at https://birackispisak.mduls.gov.rs/javniportal.

Citizens apply for changes to the Electoral Roll to the municipal or city administration of their residence. Any change in the Electoral Roll must be based on data contained in civil records, other official records and public documents (e.g. excerpts from registries of births, marriages and deaths, identity card, proof of residence, certificate of citizenship, valid and enforceable decision restoring the capacity to contract), on which the relevant decision is passed by the municipal or city administration concerned if the application is made before the closing of the Electoral Roll (15 days before the election day) or by the Ministry if the application is made from the date of closing of the Electoral Roll until 72 hours before the election day.

Instruction on Amendments to Implementation of the Law on the Unified Electoral Roll's Instruction were passed to ensure necessary conditions for the realization of citizens rights for voting abroad. Also, the law provisions have been improved in terms of connectivity civil registry books with Unified Electoral Roll, in order to ensure the accuracy, compliance and correctness of the Unified Electoral Roll.

E-participation

According to Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1, e-participation "*is the support and enhancement of democratic participation and encompasses those sectors of e-democracy where civil society and businesses are involved in drawing up formal and informal agendas and shaping and taking decisions*" (Principle 20). In addition, any type of participation can be achieved through e-democracy:
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- the provision of information;
- communication, consultation, deliberation;
- transaction, empowered participation, co-decision and decision making (Principle 12).

The e-Participation Index (EPI)

The e-participation index (EPI) is derived as a supplementary index to the UN E-Government Survey. It extends the dimension of the Survey by focusing on the use of online services to facilitate provision of information by governments to citizens ("e-information sharing"), interaction with stakeholders ("e-consultation"), and engagement in decision-making processes ("e-decision making").

In 2020, Estonia, Austria, United Kingdom, Finland, Netherlands, Denmark, France, Norway and Switzerland rank amongst the top 20 countries in the world as regards this index.

Case studies: E-participation

Single National Electronic Registry of regulations (ENER), North Macedonia

One of the key strategic priorities of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia remains to establish effective consultation with the stakeholders and more precisely, the consultation of those affected by the legislation, regulations and similar measures.

The Regulatory impact assessment (RIA) has been introduced and implemented since 2009 as new form of governance improving inclusion, transparency and accountability of the public sector, while the public consultation E-portal, Single National Electronic Registry of regulations - ENER is the key mechanism based on RIA which enables stake holders to actively participate in creating legislation in partnership with the public sector.

The ENER is an electronic system that, apart from existing regulations, also contains draft laws of ministries in their preparation stage.

The ENER is a functional tool enabling all stakeholders to submit electronically their comments and proposals directly to the competent institutions.

A series of procedures for civil servants were designed and made obligatory as part of the legislation drafting process, whereby:

- enhanced transparency is achieved by making it legally binding to publish all law drafts and law change proposals of the government, in each phase of their preparation, with detailed explanations and justifications about the proposal, including a cost-benefit analysis and analysis of different options, with an argumentation about the reasons why that specific approach was considered to most adequate, in line with the RIA principles;
- ENER provides simple, free-of-charge and direct active involvement for any company, civil society organization, media house or citizen, in the complete legislative process from the initial proposal to make law changes, to the final stage in the government procedure. Each portal visitor has full access to all relevant documents which explain why the law is being issued or amended, which impacts are expected on the society and what outcomes can be envisaged from the new legislation. Based on these data, the visitor can send proposals and comments for improvement of each draft document-legislation. Each comment is registered, published and answered with specific deadlines so if the government rejects a proposal, they have to explain why in writing, which brings the burden on them.
- ENER is directly connected with the "E-Government session" system, meaning that no law changes can reach a session without having been properly processed in the ENER with RIA Report (excluding those that are by law not subject to RIA).
- ENER guarantees that based on the obligatory administration procedures, all comments shall be published without delay and replied within a specified deadline. Each reply contains an explanation whether the comment is accepted or declined, stating the reasons for that decision, in public;
- A civil society project "Mirror of the government" is regularly monitoring and weekly publishing of the quantity and quality of use of ENER by the government.

- ENER also serves as main source for the media of relevant information about the ongoing legislation projects of the government, without having to visit every single web-site of the Ministries or use alternative routes to obtain information.

As a mechanism to bring different stakeholders together and use their expertise to the benefit of better regulations, the stakeholders get actively engaged in the policy making process, while providing guarantees that their voice will be heard and adequately considered.

The Open Data Portal, Slovak Republic

The Open Data Portal is an online portal of governmental–owned data which is open to the public in a machine-readable format for further use.

The project was initiated through a commitment under the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2012 – 2013 as a result of participatory process of co-creation among the members of the Slovak government and the civil society. The reason for initiating the project was to broaden the scope of publicly available governmental information in order to strengthen transparency and participation of civil society. The project followed the development of the Online Central Register of Contracts which allows the public to see the use of the state financial resources. The open data portal aims to provide remotely accessible data and metadata in a machine-readable form under open licenses for further use – interested activists, NGOs, citizens, academics, students, or other relevant civil society actors can use the data for public benefit. The project was initiated in 2012, and it is still in use.

Governmental agencies are encouraged to publish data based on their publishing plans and requests from the public. Public events, such as hackathons, have been organised in order to promote the portal to the public. Every year, the Office of the Plenipotentiary for

the Development of the Civil Society publishes an analysis of published data, which is consulted with stakeholders from the civil society and provides recommendations to the open data portal managing institution based on the findings.

Cooperative development of the E-participation Platform *Decidim* in City of Helsinki, Finland

The City of Helsinki is aiming to utilize the most modern approaches of co-design participatory collaboration. European co-creation has played a significant role for participation platforms. At the moment, Helsinki is utilizing and developing Decidim, which is an e-participation platform first kick-started by the City of Barcelona. The city of Helsinki is an active member of the international Decidim community, which develops the platform together and makes use of crowd-based software development methods. Decidim has been used to run several e-participation services, e.g. participatory budgeting (omastadi.hel.fi) and Mayor´s idea competition (https://www.maailmantoimivinkaupunki.fi/). The aim is to find concrete ideas on how Helsinki could become an increasingly service-minded, sustainable and creative city.

Every year, Helsinki opens up 4.4 million euros of its budget for ideas to be created and decided on by the residents. All residents of Helsinki who have turned into age of 12 years old or will turn 12 this year may vote on residents' plans. The process was launched for the first time in 2018. During the idea phase, the city received nearly 1,300 proposals, and 839 of them was found complied with the limiting factors for participatory budgeting. Out of these proposals, residents worked together with City experts to formulate nearly 300 more detailed plans to put to the vote in October 2019.

In this kind of software development process, the city benefits from international collaboration, and provides better user experience to all its inhabitants who want to contribute and take part to local development. City of Helsinki also brings its own innovations concerning participative budgeting platform into use of the whole international network of cities and developers. In this kind of software development process the city benefits from international collaboration and provides better user experience to all its inhabitants who want to contribute and take part to local development. Helsinki also brings its own innovations concerning participative budgeting platform into use of the whole international network of cities and developers. From private sector the city can acquire for example technical know-how on Decidim and certain programming skills, while avoiding the risk of being dependent on a single IT-product and company.

Better Districts: Citizens Prioritizing Projects (Reykjavík city), Iceland

Better Districts is a collaborative project between citizens and administrative authorities for prioritizing and distributing funds for new projects on a smaller scale and projects of maintenance in the districts of Reykjavík. The project is intended to enhance public participation in deliberative democracy and democratic decision making and is based on experience from previous years.

Better Districts has been running since 2012, resulting in hundreds of minor projects that have been executed by the municipality. These projects have started as ideas which individual citizens or groups have submitted online and then voted on in online public elections.

The project is based on ideas on deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, participatory budgeting – promoting public participation in democratic discussions and decision making beyond what is normally seen in a representative democracy. The project is a further developed edition of Better Districts 2012. Previous years' experience is used

as a foundation as well as expert services and information from other cities all over the world that have experience with participatory budgeting.

The projects in question are projects to enhance the quality of the residents' surroundings and increase possibilities for recreation and social gatherings, to improve equipment or opportunities for games and leisure, to encourage cycling or improve conditions for pedestrians and public transportation users.

Ideas collection in each cycle ends in April each year. The voting takes place in October-November same year and the projects are executed the following year. Citizens can participate in and follow the project on the consultation forum www.betrireykjavik.is, on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/Betri.Reykjavik or through their district service centres or district committees.

Those who want to post ideas on the website must first register as users of citizens portal Better Reykjavík – www.betrireykjavik.is Ideas are posted on the website under the district chosen. The collaboration includes viewing other users' ideas, adding comments/arguments and rating ideas. After ideas are posted they can be argued, discussed and rated.

After the Environment and Planning Division's team of experts has finished assessing and discussing ideas, the district committees organize the ideas so that residents can vote on them.
Voting will be done electronically on a special website where the Reykjavík's residents can choose between the projects. All citizens in Reykjavík 16 years of age and older can vote.

E-petitions

According to Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1, "e-petitioning is the electronic delivery of a protest or recommendation to a democratic institution: citizens sign a petition and possibly engage in a discussion on the subject by putting their names and addresses online. As is the case with petitions to parliament in general, e-petitions take various forms. E-petitions facilitate citizen input to parliament and other democratic institutions and discussion and deliberation among citizens" (Principle 45).

Case studies: E-petitions

E-petition platform, Estonia

The Citizen Initiative Portal was set up in a process called the People's Assembly (Rahvakogu) in 2012. This process was initiated by the President of Estonia together with NGOs with the aim of improving the functioning of democracy in Estonia. The Assembly combined e-tools with traditional face-to-face discussions. In three weeks, the website for Rahvakogu received about 2000 proposals. These were systematized, analysed by experts and then presented to a representative random sample of Estonian citizens (500 invited) for deliberation. The top 15 ideas approved during the Deliberation Day were presented by the President of Republic to the Parliament. Seven of those were adopted as laws (three implemented fully and four modified or combined with other laws). Among others, the citizens' initiative to the Parliament as a legal instrument was incorporated into the legal system of Estonia.

The Citizen Initiative Portal enables to write collective proposals, hold discussions, compose and send digitally signed collective addresses to the Estonian Parliament on how to amend existing regulations or improve the society. The portal makes it easier to compose, send

and monitor collective initiatives. Every citizen can use the new portal to raise an issue or make a suggestion, to discuss it publicly, to create an appeal, to collect digital signatures for it and send it to the Parliament with one click. It is also possible to monitor how the initiative is processed in the Parliament and how it may be turned into a law. In the future it will also be possible to use this portal for citizen initiatives in the local government, because according to the law 1% of the population can start a draft law.

Petitions Committee, United Kingdom

In 2015, the United Kingdom's Petitions Committee was formed by the House of Commons, the elected body of Members of Parliament. The 15 members of the Petitions Committee are nominated by the House of Commons from the government and opposition parties, and the Chair is formally elected.

The Petitions Committee oversees and considers paper and e-petitions submitted on the Parliament website. The current e-petitions system, introduced in 2015, is jointly owned by the House of Commons and the government and allows members of the public to create and support petitions for consideration by the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The Petitions Committee can write to government and other public bodies to press for action on an issue that is addressed by a petition or work with other Parliamentary Committees concerned with examining the work of government departments to look into specific issues raised by a petition.

E-petitions have to ask for a specific action from the government or the House of Commons and should be about something which the government or the House of Commons is responsible for. A petition will stay open for a period of six months and will need to be supported by at least six people before it is published on the petitions website for other people to sign. A petition might be used by campaigners in combination with other methods to attract attention and indicate the level of public interest in an issue.

The government will respond to all petitions with more than 10,000 signatures. E-petitions which reach 100,000 signatures are considered by the Committee for debate in Parliament. Most petitions which reach this threshold will be debated.

E-petitions have proven effective in raising public awareness, democratic participation and citizen engagement on a wide range of issues. Petitions are widely considered to have the potential to develop into wider initiatives and as such they can be a valuable tool for change.

Petitions can be divided into two broad categories – protest petitions and substantive petitions. In 2016, a protest petition was organised calling for retail stores to be closed on Boxing Day, the day after Christmas. It gained more than 148.000 signatories and proved highly effective in expressing dissatisfaction with existing trading hours for retailers. In contrast, substantive petitions need not have as many signatories to have an impact. For example, a 2015 petition into funding for brain tumour research sparked an inquiry after only 14.000 signatures although it gained more than 120.000 signatures in total. In the end, the petition was debated in Parliament allowing those affected by brain tumours to share their stories with the public which resulted in increased funding. Another 2015 petition, which received 12,.000 signatories, called for police dog and horses to have more legal protections if they were attacked on duty. It was subsequently debated in Parliament and new legislation was approved by Parliament.

The Petitions Committee provides an opportunity for the public to make sure their views are heard by Members of Parliament and Ministers. The Petitions Committee has power to go on fact-finding visits and take written and oral evidence. Research has shown that committee reports have great capacity to impact on government policy especially at the level of agenda setting.

Petitions, European Union

Any individual or organisation based in European Union can sign or submit to the EU on an issue related to EU policy or law (EU petitions). The website provides short and easy-to-read instructions on: "When to submit a petition?", "Who can start a petition?" and "How to create or sign a petition?". There are links to what issues the petitions can be on, that is any EU policy area. The website explains that "You can ask the European Parliament to look into an issue that affects you, or complain about how an EU law is being applied. This is called a petition." It is possible to make petitions on-line or on paper, by post, and the rules about them are the same, although for practical reasons and for those wishing to reach an audience in many EU states, on-line petitions are the preferred way. It is possible to check that the issue is not already covered by an existing petition. The European Parliament website also contains rules on petitions.

Petitions are covered by EU law, Article 227 TFEU, and the right to make petitions is regarded as a fundamental right in the EU. The right to make petitions does not require a specific format, but to make it more practical to make petitions – especially for issue of cross-border relevance – an electronic format has been developed.

Democratic institutions working through digital tools

Council of Europe member States, at all levels of government, have introduced various ways to enhance the transparent functioning of democratic institutions and to bring them closer to citizens and civil society at large. Recorded or live transmission of parliamentary proceedings are often available online or on specialised TV channels. Live streaming of official meetings of local councils have also become increasingly frequent. The need to ensure continuity during the Covid-19 crisis also led to new working methods. Time will say whether these innovations are durable.

Case study: Live streaming

e|Democracy through Local Government in Malta:
Live Streaming
…. A way to implement e|Democracy!!!

The initiative consists of providing live streaming of the Local Councils official meetings: citizens can have immediate access to the meeting without having to leave the comfort of their home. It encourages a greater number of citizens to follow local and regional Council meetings, thus promoting greater citizen participation in local government.

Understanding how local government operates is the first step to getting more people involved on a practical level. Moreover, live streaming is a tool for Local Council to be more transparent and accountable.

Live Streaming was implemented by all Local Councils in Malta and Gozo by the end of 2015. To date, links to the live cams are available on their respective websites together with the agenda. As part of the Government Electoral Manifesto measures, the current live streaming service used by local councils will be improved. The new system will offer a better, more reliable transmission and will also include on-demand availability of videos (VOD).

As part of the Local Government reform, laws governing the live streaming of council meetings have been updated to mandate that these meetings must be recorded and made

available for citizens to view at a later time (video on demand (VOD). Regional Councils are now also expected to adhere with this legislation.

To implement this legislative obligation, the Local Government Division, through its IT Unit, has devised uniform minimum requirements to not only to upgrade the equipment to improve the quality of live streaming but to include also the on-demand service. During the third quarter of 2019, minimum specifications were sent to all Local Councils to serve as guidelines.

Moreover, in order to increase standards of operation, the Local Government Division is embarking on a pilot project that will satisfy the live streaming and VOD requirements for regional councils as well help usher in the use of innovative technologies like to live-stream their scheduled meetings in 360 Degree video.

Case study: Remote meetings and other digital measures in response to Covid-19

Remote meetings and other measures of local councils, United Kingdom

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in the UK regulations have been made to enable local councils to conduct meetings remotely during the pandemic. The regulations give local councils greater flexibility while protecting the role of the public in some local decision making and the legal right for council meetings to be open to the public. For the purpose of transparency, the new regulations also provide for online publication of reports and background papers, which accommodates the closure of many council buildings and the restricted movement of protected groups during the pandemic.

Local councils have been compelled to rapidly shift their communications online and interact with the public in different ways. For example, the City of York, has hosted a live online #AskTheLeaders Coronavirus question and answer session for the public. Residents were able to participate by commenting on the live video or by submitting questions in advance by email. The questions were answered by councillors, offices and representation for the areas health care services who each responded according to their role, experience and portfolio.

B.4. Technology and data protection

Technology and technology neutrality

Checklist: Characteristics of e-Democracy tools and applications

E-democracy tools and applications should:
- facilitate and enhance access, accessibility and interoperability where feasible, by using transparent and technology-neutral means, open source solutions and open standards and specifications;
- be based on secure, high-speed (networks)/internet connections, secure infrastructure for electronic identification, respect for privacy, and net neutrality;
- use standardisation at different levels to achieve semantic and technical interoperability in areas where e-democracy tools are using interoperability and interconnection features;
- provide access under equal conditions to a neutral network as an essential condition to ensure effectiveness of human rights and equality among all stakeholders;

- not require special technology to access it (e.g. by way of normal internet access);
- include provisions for people with special needs;
- include interactive features to meet the specific needs of users;
- provide for one single point of access for both e-governance and e-democracy applications, where feasible;
- be safe, secure and robust;
- ensure, specifically in relation to electronic identification and signatures, that it is not susceptible to interference, modification or technical compromise including the use of specific digital technologies such as electronic ledgers.

Technology should be compliant with relevant existing legislation and regulation, critical infrastructure protection as well as with national and international regulations concerning privacy, data protection and networked, machine learning or computational technologies.

Checklist: How to ensure technology neutrality

Legislative and regulatory measures should protect values and principles in a technology-neutral manner:
- legislative and regulatory principles apply to all transactions and data irrespective of the technology used;
- rules focus on the desired objectives rather than prescribe specific technology, and avoid prohibiting of specific technology other than where necessary in a democratic society;
- legislation and regulation should refrain from specifying the form of transactions or documents and should not support a particular technology unless absolutely necessary otherwise.

Technology neutrality can be achieved by:
- legislation and regulation written in a goal-oriented manner (what is to be achieved);
- legislation and regulation focus on risks to mitigate, dangers to avoid, and not how to do it;
- technology neutrality is taken into consideration at different stages of rule-making in impact assessments and application;
- involving stakeholders in the process of developing and (re-)modelling ICT systems and services. Especially when e-tools are developed or substantially re-modelled (e.g. by way of an external advisory board);
- ensuring collaboration between national, regional or local authorities and stakeholders such as local associations and civil society;
- providing single points of access for e-government and e-democracy applications providing one single point of access to information sources and services delivered by the public administration.

Case studies: Technology neutrality

Single web portal of the public administration, Estonia

The Estonian public administration is based on citizen centric electronic services in all areas. These are accessed in the same way for all services by way of one web portal, www.eesti.ee. This is enabled through an interoperability system called the X-road which links all public and many private databases and allows different databases to communicate. There are no centralised databases and access to any data is determined by agreements which specify who can access what data. Any data use requires prior identification of the person accessing the data. Access is obtained via the unique personal identification code linked to the personal digital identity which all citizens and residents have (ID cards). Use of electronic services is not compulsory but the option to use them is automatically attached to all ID-cards and does not need to be requested

separately. Every time personal data are accessed by any authority, this leaves a "footprint" so the person him-/herself as well as data protection authorities can verify whenever data is accessed.

Case study: Technology and open data

Improving proactive transparency: Information booklet (in progress), Serbia

The Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, which came into force in 2004, provides that transparency in the work of public administration authorities can be achieved in two ways: proactively and reactively. Proactive transparency implies timely publishing of documents and availability of understandable information for citizens. Information booklets and their content are defined by the by the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance and they include information used or generated by public administration authorities in their work. The currently applicable arrangement for publishing the Information Booklets and the updating system lead to insufficient data, make any attempt at oversight an arduous task and provide limited possibilities for comparison of information, which reduces citizens' overall awareness of the issues.

The planned amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, will see the information contained in those Information Booklets reformatted with the aim of opening the data contained therein, improving proactive transparency and expanding the circle of administration authorities subject to the legal requirement of publishing Information Booklets.

This will entail:
1) Development of a single IT system to access, process and present the Information Booklet
2) Designing a segment of an online platform that would serve as an Information Booklet, coupled with an obligation for public administration authorities to publish information booklets in *PDF* format.
3) Training of employees in state authorities for the use of a single IT system
4) Piloting the use of the application
5) Promotion of the application (single IT system) for the public, civil sector, business sector and the media.

The proactive transparency principle is fully compliant with the open government principles, which are also stipulated by the OGP initiative. Timely provision of information in an open format would directly improve data accessibility, which will ensure transparency and accountability in the work of public administration and foster civic participation and influence on the work of public administration.

The provision of information in an *open data* format would enable subsequent processing of information and easier development of services and digital solutions for certain social services or social changes (e.g. development of a web or mobile application which would provide necessary information on required documentation to citizens).

Data protection measures

Data protection applies to the handling and safekeeping of all data regardless of the format and not only electronic or 'digital' data or transactions and should encompass:
- personal data;
- 'sensitive' political data; and

- non-personal data.

Checklist: Data protection

To ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, data protection should:
- meet all standards and requirements for data protection legislation, regulations and measures set out in the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108) and its Protocols; the Protocol amending the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CETS No. 223) and the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (ETS No. 205);
- include not only electronic or 'digital' data or transactions but also to the handling and safekeeping of all personal data regardless of the format;
- protect the interests of persons that are unaware of the dangers of data exploration and safeguards against associated the risks.

Additional protective frameworks related to data that go beyond current notions of personal data protection and privacy should be considered, reflecting the capacity of advanced technologies to use and exploit personal and non-personal data to influence the cognitive sovereignty of individuals.

E-Democracy initiatives and processes should guarantee privacy and personal data of participants in e-democracy tools and processes and information and data provided should not be used or repurposed for aims other than those stated unless informed and explicit consent has been given by the participants concerned.

Where applicable, specific or perceived vulnerabilities of electronic data should be addressed. Security issues should not lead to the exclusion of individuals and groups in democratic processes.

Persons should be able to have access to all their personal information, i.e. information that is held on them in electronic or other formats. Such information and handling of such data should comply with the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108) and its Protocols and the Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CETS No. 223).

At the same time, personal information must not be available to anyone else other than the person him/herself (or legal guardian) concerned.

B.5. Digital literacy and awareness

Digital literacy

Digital literacy is a precondition to ensure that all stakeholders can benefit from e-Democracy. Firstly, it refers to the basic ability of people to use digital technology and applications and to execute simple tasks in communicating with the authorities through, for example, on-line portals to access services or submit forms. Secondly, it refers to the ability to develop and use new technologies on the basis of a sound understanding of how the underlying technologies work. It ranges from being able to develop unique content, writing programs, using advanced tools of different kinds, to understanding how algorithms work.

Digital literacy continuously evolves and requires the ability to develop new ways to access and understand digital technologies. No effort should be spared to avoid a digital divide.

Checklist: How to promote digital literacy

- Organising or promoting special campaigns on the use of technology;
- Providing or supporting training for certain groups who may have greater difficulty in accessing technologies (older or vulnerable persons, migrant communities etc.);
- Providing access to equipment and technology such as the internet in public spaces such as libraries;
- Providing access to skilled staff and experts who can advise and assist citizens and civil society at large in using systems or to access remedies and mechanisms for redress;
- Designing specific strategies to promote digital literacy and ensure adequate financial resources for their implementation;
- Ensuring the availability of non-digital channels.

Case studies: Digital literacy and inclusion

It-guide, Örebro, Sweden

It-guide is a project that has been in progress for three years in the city of Orebro, Sweden. Young immigrants, who have been in Sweden for 1-3 years, help senior citizens with the Internet and everything there is to know about computers and mobile telephones. These it-guides receive a salary while senior citizens do not pay a fee.

The goals of the project are to give young immigrants insights and contacts in the Swedish society. By working as an It-guide, they gain confidence and inspiration to learn the Swedish language. Youngsters also gain knowledge about Sweden's past and present. The project should also make the participants feel more included in society. Another goal is enabling senior citizens to participate in the digital world while opening up to the interaction with young immigrants.

Results for the young migrants: Most of the young people never meet Swedish natives outside of school. The interactions are a great chance for them to talk to native Swedes, to practice the Swedish language, and to learn more about the Swedish culture.

Results for seniors: Most of the seniors have never met a young immigrant, which can be a cause for xenophobia. Many of the seniors have developed friendships with it-guides. It is very exciting for them to learn about a different culture and to hear about the often perilous manner in which the immigrants came to Sweden. Last Christmas the it-guides had a party and invited the seniors to dance, play games, and enjoy a lot of sweets from around the world. And of course, seniors also benefit from learning more about the Internet to participate more in society. Some seniors say they are not interested in computers, but then the it-guides use a special technique to get them interested.

The project so far has been tested in two big cities and other towns but has a potential for scaling up.

Digital inclusion strategy for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (2019-2023), United Kingdom

Data from the Office for National Statistics indicates that around 13% (71,000) of residents in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have never used the internet. The ambition of the Digital inclusion strategy is to reduce this by 25% by 2023. The strategy extends to both residents and organisations and seeks to set out key principles and actions for relevant organisations in Cornwall and beyond to adopt in order

to help tackle the recognised digital exclusion barriers. There are six areas to focus on digital literacy and skills, accessibility, affordability, motivation, trust and confidence.

Awareness and acceptance

Developing awareness and acceptance of e-Democracy includes the following elements:

- public information, education and training;
- awareness-raising and training for public officials and individuals;
- safety awareness and training, to equip users with the skills to identify dangers online, critically appraise information and understand what steps to keep themselves and others safe online.
- pilot projects.

Concrete measures to promote awareness and acceptance

- the creation of multi-dimensional platforms involving all possible stakeholders, including traditional democracy stakeholders whose roles may be changing in the development of e-Democracy applications/platforms, taking into account their interests at the early stages of developing e-democracy measures to provide input and elaborate solutions to a specific problem;
- using or building upon 'tried and tested' e-Democracy applications developed by other authorities or civil society organisations that have already found acceptance;
- using as much as possible the technology which is already in use (at national, regional or local level) with a view to ensuring efficiency and strengthen security by limiting additional risks and vulnerabilities;
- developing communication strategies aimed at raising awareness and understanding the objectives, tools, processes and net benefits for different stakeholders of e-Democracy initiatives, taking into account culture and values;
- showcasing leadership and commitment by senior management and elected officials, which can significantly contribute to overcoming possible resistance to change;
- setting up dedicated teams responsible for implementing e-Democracy strategies and action plans;
- civil society organisations to assist in disseminating public information, providing training developing new e-democracy tools in line with citizens' expectations.

User experience

User experience and satisfaction is also an element to be taken into account in developing e- services. The following issues should be considered:

- availability in full of all services provided by authorities/public administration online in the electronic portal. Inconsistency in the provision of some services online negatively impacts on satisfaction;
- availability of interactive services. Tailored online assistance (also by way of an online chat with support staff or digital voice assistants to assist users with specific difficulties);
- providing tools that meet basic requirements in terms of functionality and lay-out taking into consideration constraints in terms of mobile computing applications or bandwidth limitations.

PART C: LIST OF COUNCIL OF EUROPE KEY STANDARDS AND DOCUMENTS

Protocol amending the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CETS No. 223)

Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (ETS No. 205)

Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185)

Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108)

Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2 of the Committee of Ministers on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries

Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on standards for e-voting, with Guidelines and Explanatory Memorandum

Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)1 on protecting the right to freedom of expression and the right to private life with regard to network neutrality and the guidelines set out therein

Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)6 on a Guide to human rights for Internet users

Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on electronic (e-democracy), with its Glossary and the following Indicative Guides:
- No. 1: Generic tools and policies for an electronic democracy
- No. 2: A roadmap approach to e-democracy
- No. 3: A checklist for the introduction of e-democracy tools
- No. 4: A framework for reporting e-democracy initiatives
- No. 5: Evaluating e-democracy

Recommendation Rec(2004)15 on electronic governance ("e-governance")

Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes (2019)

12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance