

MANAGING THE DIGITALISATION OF PUBLIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

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SUMMARY

Relevance of the audit

Access to state and local government services quickly and conveniently is a key aspect of citizens' quality of life and well-being. The use of information and communication technologies in the delivery of public and administrative services not only improves the citizens' experience of accessing services, but also makes the functioning of the state more efficient, transparent, open, and smooth. Digitalisation simplifies and optimises institutional processes, reduces the number of paper documents, improves the accessibility of public and administrative services for all groups of society. User-friendly electronic services reduce costs and save time and effort for citizens, entrepreneurs, civil servants, and institutional staff.

The constraints that were in force during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need for, and benefits of, public and administrative electronic services. The digitalisation of these services has become particularly relevant, but the mere fact that the state offers services electronically is no longer sufficient because society needs fast, efficient, universally accessible services and a more seamless digital experience.

Recognising that managing the digitalisation of public and administrative services and the efficiency of their integration and development are important for the higher maturity of Lithuania's public and administrative electronic services, and for greater accessibility for the public institutions and the authorities, we carried out a public audit.

Objective and scope of the audit

The objective of the audit is to assess whether the digitalisation of public and administrative services is enabling the delivery of quality electronic services that meet the needs of society.

Key audit questions:

- ✓ Whether the effective development of the digitalisation of public and administrative services is ensured;
- ✓ Whether monitoring and quality assessment of public and administrative electronic services is ensured;
- ✓ Whether technological tools to manage information on public and administrative electronic services and to provide them to the public in a one-stop shop have been developed.

Audited entities:

- ✓ The Ministry of Economy and Innovation, as it formulates the state policy in the fields of management of state information resources and development of the information society and organises, controls and coordinates the implementation thereof¹;
- ✓ The Ministry of the Interior, as it formulates the state policy in the field of public administration, and organises, coordinates and controls its — ². The Ministry establishes the procedure for the administration of the provision of public services and the preparation of descriptions of the provision of administrative services³, analyses the processes of the provision of administrative services and public services, prepares proposals for the improvement of these processes and for the improvement of the quality and accessibility of services⁴;
- ✓ The Information Society Development Committee, as it implements the state policy in the fields of management of state information resources and development of the information society, analyses the use of state information resources for state governance and public and administrative services, and prepares proposals for improving the use of state information resources for state governance and public and administrative services⁵.

During the audit, we gathered information from and communicated with representatives of the Ministries of Economy and Innovation, the Interior, and Transport and Communications, the Information Society Development Committee, the Central Project Management Agency, the Radiation Protection Centre, and the Environmental Protection

¹ Law on Management of State Information Resources, Article 5(2), Regulations of the Ministry of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania, approved by Government Resolution No. 921 of 23 July 1998, paragraph 7.3.

² Law on Public Administration, Article 6(3) and (5), Regulations of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania approved by Government Resolution No. 291 of 14 March 2001, paragraph 7.2.

³ Law on Public Administration, Article 19(2), Article 20(4)(8).

⁴ Regulations of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, paragraph 10.2.

⁵ Law on Management of State Information Resources, Article 6(2), Regulations of the Information Society Development Committee approved by Order No. 4-593 of the Minister of Economy and Innovation of 1 October 2018, paragraph 11.10.

Agency. We also interviewed state bodies and municipalities providing public and administrative services.

The audit period is 2018-2022. To assess trends and developments in the implementation of the strategic objectives of digitalisation of public and administrative services, we used data from the previous years (2014-2017) and 2023.

The audit was carried out in accordance with international standards for supreme audit institutions. The scope of the audit and the methods applied are described in more detail in Annex 2 “Audit scope and methods” (page 38).

Key audit findings

The management of the digitalisation of public and administrative services needs to be improved, as ensuring that all electronic public and administrative services provided by the institutions are accessible through a one-stop shop, establishing an effective system for monitoring and assessing the quality of public and administrative services, and accelerating the implementation of the goals and objectives of the digitalisation of these services will enable the provision of quality electronic services that meet the needs of society.

1. Failure to ensure the provision of quality electronic services to the public

- ✓ Almost one in five users of the Electronic Government Gateway portal are not satisfied with the services provided. Reliable data on all public and administrative electronic services provided is not available and is not collected in the State Information Resources Interoperability Platform. The Committee for the Development of the Information Society carries out surveys on the use of the 12 core services once or twice a year to assess the quality of these services. Users of the Electronic Government Gateway portal could also contribute to the improvement of the services, but they are not active: only 1.3% of those who have used the services created on the portal have provided evaluations. Given the low level of user involvement, the data obtained is insufficient to cause informed changes and service improvements (Section 1.1, page 13).
- ✓ Failure to ensure that all public and administrative electronic services are available through a one-stop shop. Two catalogues of services have been created in Lithuania, which complicates the accessibility of services, as not all (80.1%) of the public and administrative services listed in the Information System for Monitoring and Analysis of Public and Administrative Services are available electronically through the State Information Resources Interoperability Platform, the Electronic Government Gateway portal, and information on the number of electronically provided services varies. Only 8.8% of these services accessible through the platform are classified as life events. One in three electronic services created on the platform (32.3% in 2020, 28.2% in 2021, and 31.6% in 2022) is used only up to 10 times a year, and a significant proportion of the services created on the platform are not used at all in a year (24.2% in 2020, 30.6% in 2021, and 29.9% in 2022). Nineteen point six percent (21 out of 107) of the services not used or used up to 10 times in 2022 are not public or administrative. The incomplete implementation of one of the main functions of the platform, namely the

creation of a catalogue of electronic services provided by the institutions, aligned with the Information System for Monitoring and Analysis of Public and Administrative Services, does not ensure that all public and administrative electronic services provided by public bodies and municipalities are accessible through the platform and that the information provided to the public on the services offered is accurate (Section 1.2, page 14).

- ✓ Tools to monitor and evaluate all public and administrative electronic services have not been developed. The Information System for Monitoring and Analysis of Public and Administrative Services is not designed to collect information on services and does not collect data on indicators for monitoring service delivery. The monitoring carried out by the Committee for the Development of the Information Society covers only the evaluation of the 12 main electronic public and administrative services provided. The evaluations are carried out by commissioning studies rather than on the basis of data collected in the system. There is no state-wide monitoring of the achievement of the planned benefits of digitalisation of public and administrative services (in terms of costs incurred). The lack of data on the quality of all electronic and non-electronic public and administrative services does not allow for an assessment of the efficiency of electronic service provision, the benefits of these services, user satisfaction, the lack of knowledge of whether the time taken to provide a service is reduced if it is provided electronically, the lack of analysis of the relationship between the number of complaints, the number of services started and completed electronically, and the number of services completed electronically and non-electronically, and the level of automation, etc. In addition, conditions for a centralised monitoring of all electronic services on the basis of these aggregated data (Section 1.3, page 16) are not created.
- ✓ Institutions do not sufficiently assess the user-friendliness of their public and administrative electronic services and identify service development needs. Methodological documents have been developed recommending that the quality of services should be measured in terms of the level of satisfaction of users' expectations and/or compliance with the indicators set by the institution, but the institutions indicated that they lack a clear methodology for monitoring and evaluating electronic services during the monitoring of electronic services. The majority (76.7%) of institutions providing public and administrative electronic services monitor their services, but about half (55.1%) of them have established indicators for electronic services, and only one third (29.3%) have indicators for user satisfaction with these services. Although methodological guidelines for assessing the user-friendliness of electronic services have been developed for institutions to help them design, develop and deploy high-quality user-oriented electronic services, only one third (35.3%) of institutions carry out user-friendliness assessments and a small proportion (only 7) follow the guidelines. Areas for improvement in the service delivery process are identified, documented and service improvement plans are developed by 14.7% of institutions. The vast majority of institutions (85.3%) do not monitor and evaluate the quality of all their public and administrative services in such a way that they have valid data to identify and plan for service development and improvement needs (Section 1.4, page 18).

2. Failure to ensure the effective development of digitalisation of public and administrative services

- ✓ The goals and targets for the digitalisation of public and administrative services set for 2014-2020 have not yet been met and in 2023, almost a third of the measures envisaged to achieve the goals and targets for service digitalisation are still being implemented. Only 12 (out of 134 planned) advanced and 4 (out of 64) new electronic services related to the Lithuanian language and cultural heritage were created in 2020, 58 (out of 134) and 64 (out of 64) respectively in 2023, and 60 are still pending. In 2020, the objectives and targets of the programme were not met: Three out of four planned evaluation criteria, which provide information on the achievement of the objectives of digitalisation of services, and three out of six product evaluation criteria, which show the achievement of the objectives, were not achieved. Although the implementation of the measures is ongoing, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation has not been monitoring the indicators for the implementation of the programme since 2021. In the absence of progress monitoring, delays in the implementation of the strategic objectives, targets and measures before the end of the planned implementation period, so that action can be taken to manage the risk of delays, are not identified (Section 2.1, page 22).
- ✓ During the 2014-2020 development period, public and administrative services were to be digitalised to ensure that their quality was improved and their accessibility to the public increased, and developments in the digitalisation of services are monitored and evaluated according to the indicators (evaluation criteria) set out in the strategy documents. We found that the existing indicators are designed to monitor and evaluate the level (frequency) of use of electronic services by the citizens or to measure the result of the implementation of the programme measure (number of electronic services created, number of objects digitalised), and that only one of them (out of 12) is useful for measuring the level of maturity of the online availability of the services. In 2020, the majority of the advanced electronic services were not yet developed (91.0%); however, the values of the criteria for the evaluation of the objective and targets were almost met or exceeded. In 2023, after the development of all the envisaged electronic services related to the Lithuanian language and cultural heritage, the evaluation criteria were almost unchanged. Thus, the indicators set out in the strategic documents are not sufficient to measure improvements in the quality of electronic services and their target values are not sufficiently ambitious to measure progress in digitalising services. This makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness, impact and societal benefits of digitalisation projects and measures (Section 2.2, page 25).
- ✓ Forty-three applications were submitted (of which six were cancelled) for Objectives 2 and 3 of the Digital Agenda for the Republic of Lithuania 2014-2020. The allocated funding amounted to EUR 133 million, but the 37 projects received 72.3% of the allocated amount, comprising EUR 96.2 million. The vast majority of municipalities (63.6%) planned to implement projects for the digitalisation of public and administrative services under the Ministry of Economy and Innovation's State Digitalisation Development Programme 2021-2030, but only 65.71% of them submitted project application(s). Correspondingly, more than one in four state bodies (28.4%) planned to implement projects for the digitalisation of public and administrative services, but only 60.9% of them submitted project application(s). Institutions indicated that they did not receive information about the possibility to apply or

received it too late, and that they lacked information and IT specialists. The lack of use of national development programmes to digitalise public and administrative services is not leading to development progressing as fast as it could (Section 2.3, page 28).

Recommendations

For the Ministry of Economy and Innovation

1. To ensure the provision of quality public and administrative electronic services to the public (Key Audit Result 1):
 - 1.1. To develop tools and ensure that data on all available electronic services are collected nationwide;
 - 1.2. To carry out centralised monitoring of all electronic services on the basis of the data collected;
 - 1.3. To develop tools to ensure that all electronic services are available through the Electronic Government Gateway portal;
 - 1.4. To promote user involvement in the evaluation of services;
 - 1.5. To provide measures to assess the reasons for the lack of use or under-use of the electronic services developed and, if necessary, to initiate improvements in their delivery process.
2. In order to assess the actual benefits generated by the process of digitalisation of services, to provide for measures to ensure periodic monitoring at national level of the achievement of both the objectives and the planned benefits (Key Audit Result 1).
3. To accelerate and improve the achievement of the strategic objectives through the digitalisation of public and administrative services, to take encouraging action (Key Audit Result 2):
 - 3.1. For policymakers to achieve better results in digitalising services;
 - 3.2. For public and administrative bodies providing public services and municipalities to participate in digitalisation initiatives.

For the Ministry of the Interior

4. To ensure the monitoring of quality and accessibility indicators for public and administrative services, provide for measures to ensure the application of uniform practices for the assessment of the quality of these services, and a more efficient process for monitoring the quality of the services (Key Audit Result 1).

The measures and timeframes for implementing the recommendations, the expected impact of the audit and the indicators for measuring change are set out in the section “Plan for the implementation of the recommendations” (page 31) of the report. Up-to-date information on the status of the implementation of the recommendations, results and developments is published in open data on the National Audit Office’s website at <https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys>.