Effective Government Information Websites

TOOLKIT FOR IMPLEMENTATION

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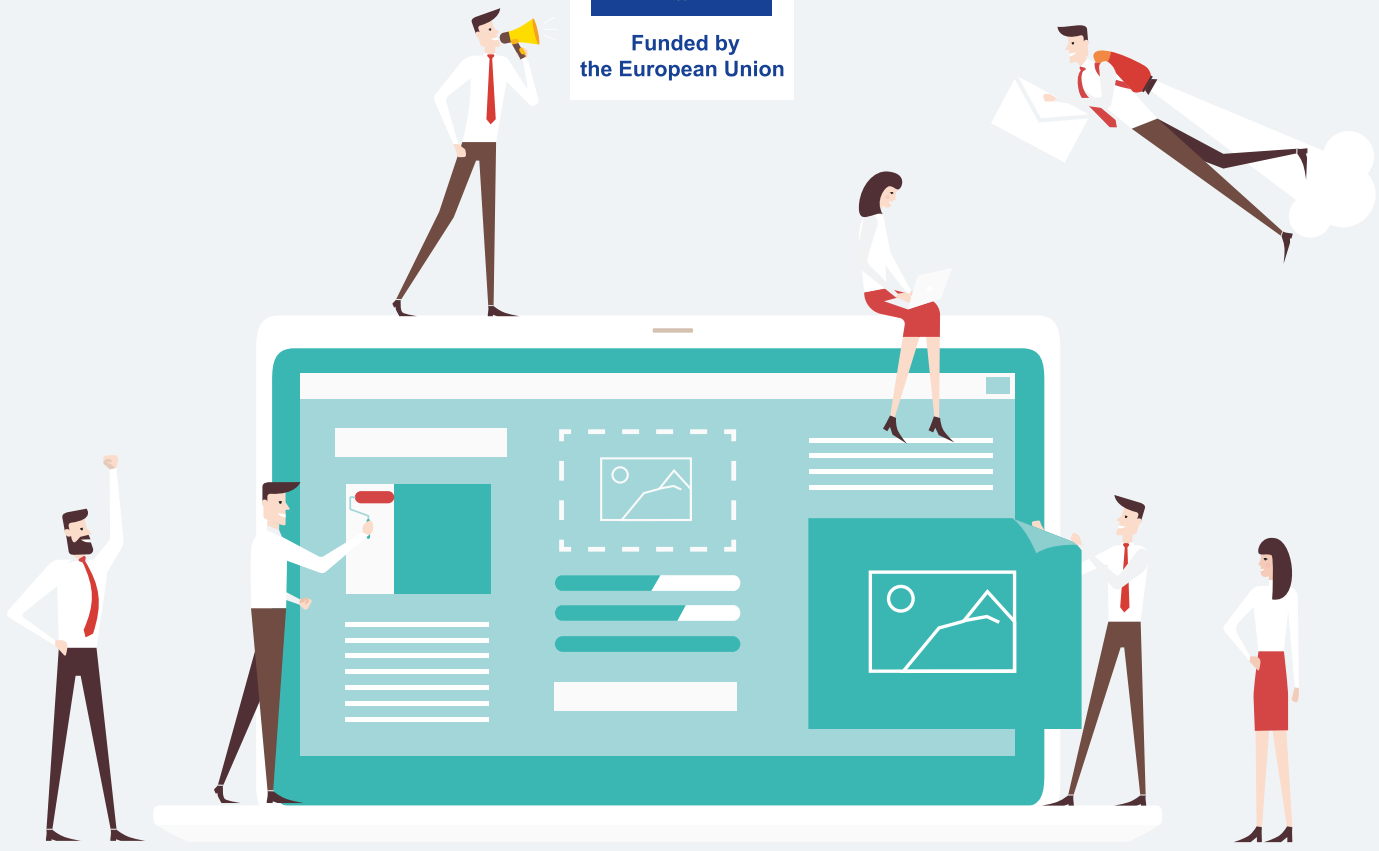

OECD

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Foreword

The use of digital technology to simplify interactions and improve information exchange between governments and citizens has increased in most OECD member countries in recent years. Government websites dedicated to informing citizens can provide opportunities for engagement, improve information and service delivery in all areas, and enhance trust between government authorities and citizens. The COVID-19 pandemic has made digital information sharing all the more important.

This report looks at how a well-designed government information website can help improve citizen-government interaction. It provides a practical toolkit for designing, operating and upgrading government information websites, taking into account elements such as the OECD's *Good Practice Principles for Public Service Design and Delivery in the Digital Age*. It is based on the work funded by the European Commission (DG REFORM) and conducted by the OECD under the project in Greece "Simplification of Administrative Processes and Support for Advancing the Implementation of Digital Transformation Projects", as part of the OECD's broader work on administrative burden reduction. While drawing extensively on the Greek government's experience in setting up the National Registry of Administrative Procedures with the OECD's support, findings and recommendations are based on good practice in OECD countries.

Furthermore, it builds on the OECD's significant body of work related to governance of regulatory policy, data-driven regulation and agile regulation. This includes OECD analysis such as i) *Improving Regulatory Delivery in Food Safety* and *Data-Driven, Information-Enabled Regulatory Delivery*, which focuses on promoting the transformation of the public administration through the use of digital technology ii) the 2021 *Recommendation for Agile Regulatory Governance to Harness Innovation* that helps governments rethink their approaches to rule making for harnessing innovation iii) the *Best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy: One-Stop Shops for Citizens and Business*, which operationalises principles highlighted in the 2012 *Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance* to facilitate interactions between governments and citizens and businesses.

Similarly, the OECD *Digital Government Policy Framework: Six dimensions of a Digital Government* reflects the principles and actions needed for countries to deliver a whole-of-government and user-driven digitalisation of government processes and services. The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Digital Government Strategies identifies specific provisions to engage users throughout the digitalisation of government processes and services. Likewise, the OECD *Framework for Public Service Design and Delivery* identifies the contextual factors, philosophical approach and core enablers that enable a user-driven digitalisation of government services at scale and pace.

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This paper was authored by Florentin Blanc, Senior Policy Analyst, and Giuseppa Ottimofiore, Policy Analyst, along with Margaret Dritsas, Carola Bertone, Hamsini Shankar, and Katerina Kaskantiri, consultants for the OECD. This document benefitted from the input of Tiziano Lattisi and Andrés Blancas, consultants, and Alberto Morales and Costanza Caputi, Policy Analysts. The authors would like to thank Natalia Shevchuk and Eleni Leontidou, consultants, for their support. The report was prepared for publication by Jennifer Stein.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
DGME	Directorate General for State Modernisation of France
DILA	Directorate of Legal and Administrative information of France
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
ID	Identification
ML	Machine Learning

Executive summary

For the purposes of this paper, “information websites” are websites created by public institutions to provide citizens with information on public services, procedures and rules to walk them through the complexity of the public sector when trying to solve their needs. They can be distinguished from *transactional portals*, which allow citizens or businesses to directly initiate and potentially complete administrative procedures from an end-to-end perspective.

To be effective, information websites should meet four main requirements: *authoritativeness* (information given on the website is not contradicted by public officials “on the ground”), *comprehensiveness* (at least on the topics covered on the website), *fit-for-purpose* and *ease of navigation*, so that citizens can easily find what they are looking for and actually identify solutions to address their needs. Information websites seek to efficiently and effectively ensure that citizens have all the necessary information before they request specific governmental services.

Effective information website design is not a straightforward task. Governments, and public institutions more generally, should clearly identify the goals of these websites to monitor effectiveness. While many governments and public bodies have used such websites to provide digital public services and promote citizen engagement, only a few information websites appear to be successful as information sources from public institutions to citizens.

Similarly, countries in the transition towards being digital governments face the challenge of horizontal integration and coherence across public sector institutions for a concerted and aligned way to understand user needs and provide relevant information to solve their problems in a more convenient and effective manner (OECD, 2020[1]). For this reason, as stated in the OECD Framework for Public Service Design and Delivery, government information services should be considered an integral component of a whole-of-government and omnichannel strategy for service design and delivery so the experience of users is consistent and coherent regardless of their preferred channel (OECD, 2020[3]).

Moreover, several governments have focused their efforts solely on publishing extensive amounts of information, as required by their legal framework, but ensuring access to meaningful and comprehensive information for citizens requires more: for example, adopting practices to improve accessibility conditions and communication standards while reducing administrative burdens. Procedural complexity, a plethora of regulations, organisational structures, technicalities, legal bottlenecks, communication failures and various other issues commonly found throughout the public sector can hinder efforts to clearly inform citizens about administrative processes.

Governments are increasingly focusing on tackling public governance challenges, improving communication practices, and achieving the digital transformation of the public sector. This report presents a practical toolkit to ensure high-quality government information websites, as well as key elements to upgrade sites, including transactional portals (i.e. platforms that allow users to conduct formalities digitally). The report extensively describes the Greek government’s work on the National Registry of Administrative Procedures, which was carried out with the OECD’s technical assistance. Beyond the Greek experience, findings and recommendations are based on good practice examples in OECD countries, including

Canada, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom. The toolkit provides findings and recommendations across three areas to ease their implementation: i) resource management, ii) building blocks for effective information websites and iii) upgrading informational portals. It is designed to offer practical input and hands-on advice for governments wishing to implement information websites.

Resource management

The first chapter considers the planning and management of resources when building information websites, which is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these websites. This entails:

- Comprehensive cost estimates for the original development of information websites, taking into account the need for maintenance and upgrades.
- Resource requirements, including the choice of platform functionalities that support all relevant functions – the software used, the people involved, and the content stored – as well as the resources needed to create and update content in the platform.

Building blocks for effective information websites

The second chapter addresses the main elements to be considered during the implementation of government information websites to ensure they achieve their goals: 1) the structure and use of the information website, with a focus on the homepage and the search tool; 2) the engagement with, outreach to, and assistance for end-users to promote use and instil confidence; 3) the necessary, continuous improvement of platforms to ensure they are fit-for-purpose.

- The website should be designed and developed with the end-user in mind, with their involvement during early development stages.
- Information websites should have visually pleasant, easy-to-understand homepages, which enable all users to find necessary information. The website should include a powerful, user-friendly search tool. The information should be organised in a clear and intuitive way. Moreover, the hierarchy of information should be defined according to available data, and be based on citizen/business consultations to ensure clarity of language.
- Different stakeholders to test the websites before launch should be engaged to ensure accountability and the incorporation of different points of views (interests or profiles) collected during development phases.
- The performance of information websites should be regularly assessed.
- Improvements, modifications, and upgrades should then be proposed and implemented (based on the aforementioned assessments) – taking into account good practices, expert advice, and stakeholder/user inputs.

Upgrading informational portals

The final chapter of this report addresses the adoption of technological features and developments to further enhance search tools, as well as the upgrading of informational platform to transactional portals. Recommendations include the following:

- Planning and developing the adoption of virtual assistants to improve the end-user experience.
- Developing an app version for all website services – thereby increasing website accessibility.
- Streamlining the transition from communication webpages to transactional websites, where users can obtain relevant information and receive public services.

1 Resource management

This chapter focuses on providing recommendations for planning and management of resources needed to launch and operate an effective government information website. It provides insights into selecting the appropriate software that should support all the features of the website. The chapter also illustrates the need for resources in developing and updating content for information websites.

Planning

Long-term planning and management of technological and human resources are key elements to succeed in the implementation of an effective government information website. Often times, government fail to consider the long-term sustainability of software projects. Information website should not be conceived as "one-off" activities, rather as a dynamic project that is sustainable over time. Proper planning and management of resources ensure the effectiveness and efficiency in the operation and management of information, and support the overall governance of the project.

Comprehensive cost-based estimations

Finding

Cost-based estimations which look at the entire lifecycle of an information website can ensure that the website is performing effectively and is regularly updated.

Recommendation

Web design is a continuous process involving planning, conceptualising, implementing, maintaining and updating. Each phase requires time and involves costs related to procuring software licenses, hardware, human resources, training etc. An estimation of the total costs should be performed at the inception stage to better allocate resources throughout the lifecycle of the website.

Actions for implementation

1. Develop comprehensive cost estimates that take into account the whole lifecycle and long-term sustainability of the information website to make sure that investments deliver intended benefits. Cost-based estimations should include:
    a) Cost for acquiring the hardware and software infrastructure: Both the components can be directly purchased or acquired as a service (cloud). In the first case, this includes costs for purchasing servers and associated costs such as housing the servers and cooling systems. In the second case, complex virtual environments like Google Cloud, Microsoft Azure and Amazon AWS can also significantly impact total costs. Other costs to consider can come from server workload, database and storage infrastructure, network bandwidth requirements, installing plugins etc. Additional set up or start-up costs should be considered too, and may include development or content creation costs.
    b) Costs for management of infrastructure and the software platform: Once a website is created, it needs to be managed. Moreover, the platform requires human resources, and the management can either be internal or through external contracts.
    c) Costs for editing and updating the contents of the website. Depending on the size and functionality of the website, these costs may vary. Websites can be maintained on a quarterly or even monthly basis. The domain name of the website needs to be renewed on a timely basis and can incur costs. This includes both the domain name and the domain extension such as ".com". Examples of other costs include web hosting costs, email services, customer support (including live chat and email ticketing system) etc. Such costs could also result from law or policy changes, as well as from government re-shuffles, which may require a rearrangement of how information is presented on the website.
    d) Costs for maintenance. This entails ordinary maintenance (e.g. cloud costs, support, content update, etc.) and non-routine maintenance (e.g. hardware/software or platform upgrade).

e) Costs for evolution of the platform and its features. To make the website more interactive, analytics and algorithms make predictions based on previous searches. Embedding these features can be costly and should be factored in the overall budget. Similarly, governments should invest in regular performance and satisfaction measurement that inform their continuous improvement. Costs related to migration (e.g. reversibility costs for the migration to a different platform) and those derived from legacy systems should be considered, too. Considerations regarding compatibility with future updates should also be taken into account.

2. Evaluate the "as a Service" option for all the layers of the infrastructure and related maintenance:
   a) the hardware (e.g. servers and network devices)
   b) the platforms (e.g. web servers and database engines)
   c) the software (e.g. out-of-the-box web portal application)
   d) software as a service (SaaS) for maintenance and support
3. Evaluate a software solution/framework considering the impact on costs defined above.

Resource requirements for information websites

Software to enable core functionalities

Finding

International experience suggest that software is the core dimension for the development of an information website.

Recommendation

The website should support all functions related to the software applied, the people involved and the content stored. The choice of software and related extensions is important to ensure that the website guarantees analysis and continuous updating.

Actions for implementation

1. Define requirements for software that take into account the dynamic nature of the website. The software should ensure a two-way flow of information, i.e. from the website to the user and vice-versa. Hence, the software (and its extensions) should be able to "learn" from user queries, search preferences, etc.
2. Consider the use of extensions as they can enhance the functionalities of software. Namely, extensions can add value to the base software through generation of statistics, vocabularies etc. This can help in creating catalogues of information and classify data with the goal of improving the effectiveness of user searches.

Good practice examples

Software learning is done through extensions. These extensions collect and standardise information based on use (e.g. browsing behaviour within a website), helping to generate additional interfaces based on the most useful information. In the context of information websites, such extensions can collect specific information about the queries of users, categorise this information, and generate additional content that is most useful based on the user behaviour.

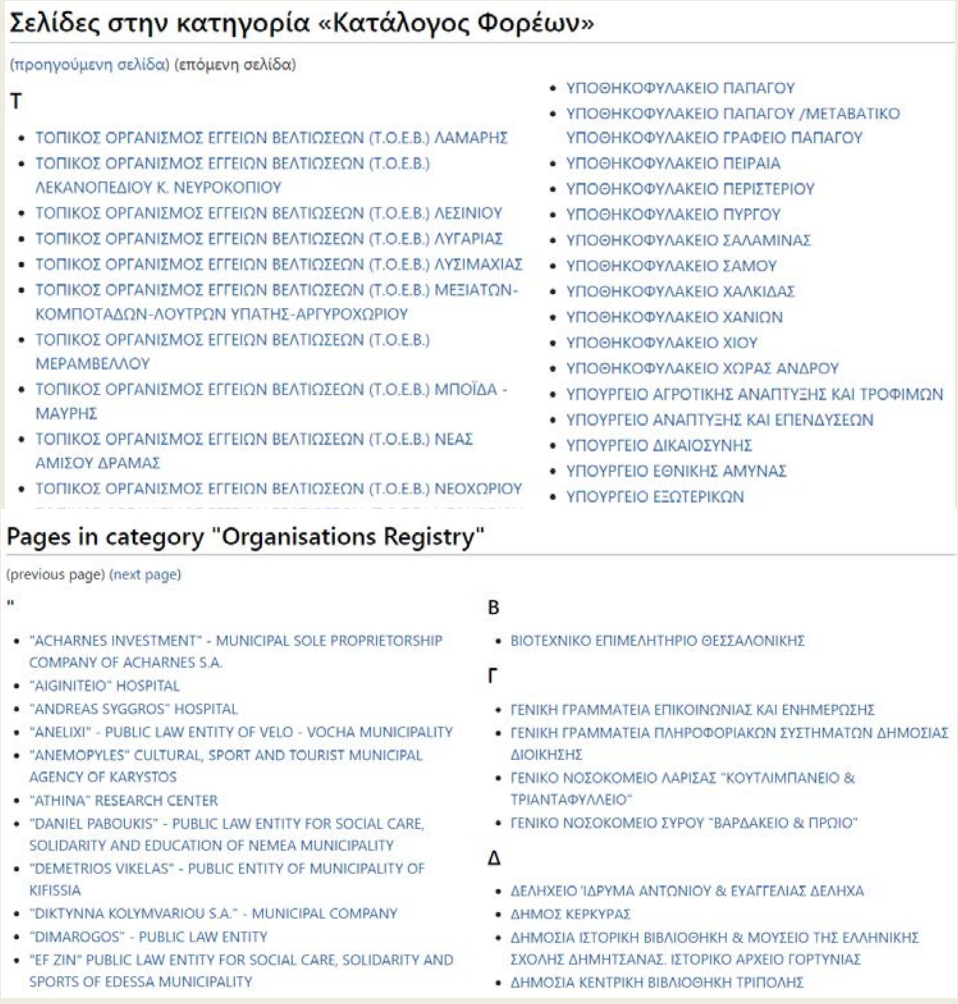
In Greece, the software of the National Registry of Administrative Procedures was complemented with several extensions to enhance its effectiveness. See relevant good practice in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1. Indicative list of useful extensions: Greek National Registry of Administrative Procedures

An extension is a software that allows the management of accumulated content, to generate useful summaries and statistics, to create vocabularies from the entries of the national registries and to perform multi-faceted semantic queries over the structured data of each procedure.

The Greek Registry employed a software to allow the querying of content within pages as well as the development of catalogues that are directly linked to administrative procedures. For example, Figure 1.1 displays the catalogue of organisations that is available on the home page.

Figure 1.1. Catalogue of organisations



Σελίδες στην κατηγορία «Κατάλογος Φορέων»

(προηγούμενη σελίδα) (επόμενη σελίδα)

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- ΤΟΠΙΚΟΣ ΟΡΓΑΝΙΣΜΟΣ ΕΓΓΕΙΩΝ ΒΕΛΤΙΩΣΕΩΝ (Τ.Ο.Ε.Β.) ΛΑΜΑΡΗΣ
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Pages in category "Organisations Registry"

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- "ACHARNES INVESTMENT" - MUNICIPAL SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP COMPANY OF ACHARNES S.A.
- "AIGINITEIO" HOSPITAL
- "ANDREAS SYGGROS" HOSPITAL
- "ANELIXI" - PUBLIC LAW ENTITY OF VELO - VOCHA MUNICIPALITY
- "ANEMOPYLES" CULTURAL, SPORT AND TOURIST MUNICIPAL AGENCY OF KARYSTOS
- "ATHINA" RESEARCH CENTER
- "DANIEL PABOUKIS" - PUBLIC LAW ENTITY FOR SOCIAL CARE, SOLIDARITY AND EDUCATION OF NEMEA MUNICIPALITY
- "DEMETRIOS VIKELAS" - PUBLIC ENTITY OF MUNICIPALITY OF KIFISSIA
- "DIKTYNNA KOLYMVARIOU S.A." - MUNICIPAL COMPANY
- "DIMAROGOS" - PUBLIC LAW ENTITY
- "EF ZIN" PUBLIC LAW ENTITY FOR SOCIAL CARE, SOLIDARITY AND SPORTS OF EDESSA MUNICIPALITY

Β

- ΒΙΟΤΕΧΝΙΚΟ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΗΤΗΡΙΟ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

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- ΓΕΝΙΚΟ ΝΟΣΟΚΟΜΕΙΟ ΣΥΡΟΥ "ΒΑΡΔΑΚΕΙΟ & ΠΡΩΙΟ"

Δ

- ΔΕΛΗΧΕΙΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΑΝΤΩΝΙΟΥ & ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΑΣ ΔΕΛΗΧΑ
- ΔΗΜΟΣ ΚΕΡΚΥΡΑΣ
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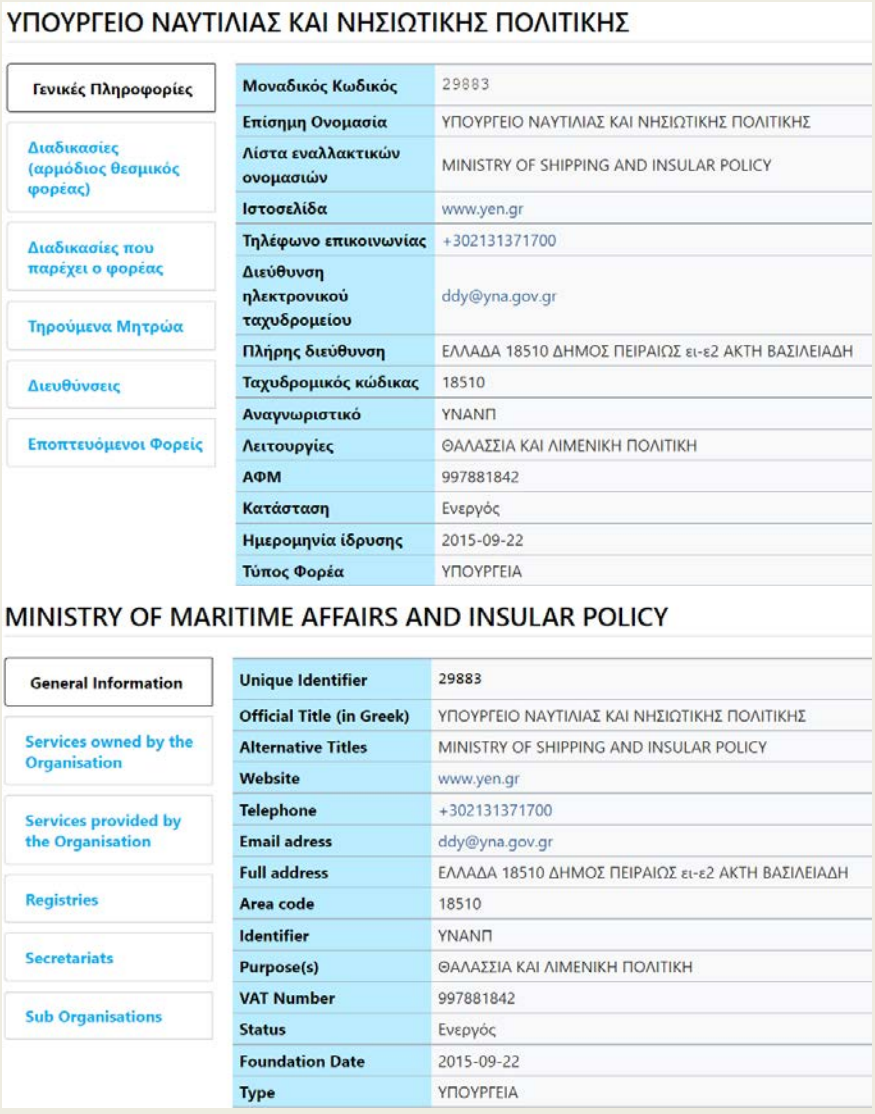
- ΔΗΜΟΣΙΑ ΚΕΝΤΡΙΚΗ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ ΤΡΙΠΟΛΗΣ

One can select an organisation and see the organisation's data.

For example, by choosing the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy one can get the main description fields – "General information" ("*Γενικές Πληροφορίες*") (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2. Description fields



ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΝΑΥΤΙΛΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΝΗΣΙΩΤΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ

Γενικές Πληροφορίες
Διαδικασίες (αρμόδιος θεσμικός φορέας)
Διαδικασίες που παρέχει ο φορέας
Τηρούμενα Μητρώα
Διευθύνσεις
Εποπτευόμενοι Φορείς

Μοναδικός Κωδικός	29883
Επίσημη Ονομασία	ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΝΑΥΤΙΛΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΝΗΣΙΩΤΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ
Λίστα εναλλακτικών ονομασιών	MINISTRY OF SHIPPING AND INSULAR POLICY
Ιστοσελίδα	www.yen.gr
Τηλέφωνο επικοινωνίας	+302131371700
Διεύθυνση ηλεκτρονικού ταχυδρομείου	ddy@yna.gov.gr
Πλήρης διεύθυνση	ΕΛΛΑΔΑ 18510 ΔΗΜΟΣ ΠΕΙΡΑΙΩΣ ει-ε2 ΑΚΤΗ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΔΗ
Ταχυδρομικός κώδικας	18510
Αναγνωριστικό	ΥΝΑΝΠ
Λειτουργίες	ΘΑΛΑΣΣΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΛΙΜΕΝΙΚΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ
ΑΦΜ	997881842
Κατάσταση	Ενεργός
Ημερομηνία ίδρυσης	2015-09-22
Τύπος Φορέα	ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΑ

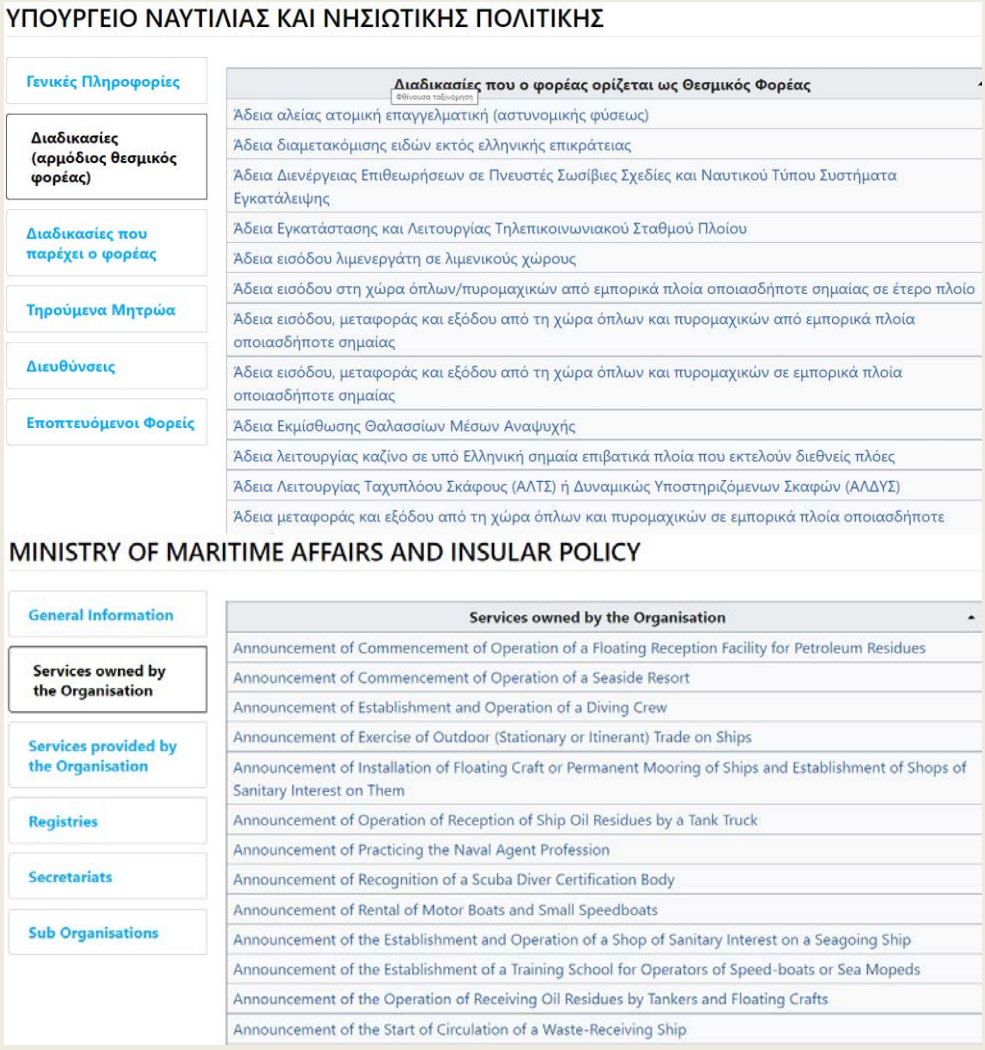
MINISTRY OF MARITIME AFFAIRS AND INSULAR POLICY

General Information
Services owned by the Organisation
Services provided by the Organisation
Registries
Secretariats
Sub Organisations

Unique Identifier	29883
Official Title (in Greek)	ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΝΑΥΤΙΛΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΝΗΣΙΩΤΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ
Alternative Titles	MINISTRY OF SHIPPING AND INSULAR POLICY
Website	www.yen.gr
Telephone	+302131371700
Email adress	ddy@yna.gov.gr
Full address	ΕΛΛΑΔΑ 18510 ΔΗΜΟΣ ΠΕΙΡΑΙΩΣ ει-ε2 ΑΚΤΗ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑΔΗ
Area code	18510
Identifier	ΥΝΑΝΠ
Purpose(s)	ΘΑΛΑΣΣΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΛΙΜΕΝΙΚΗ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ
VAT Number	997881842
Status	Ενεργός
Foundation Date	2015-09-22
Type	ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΑ

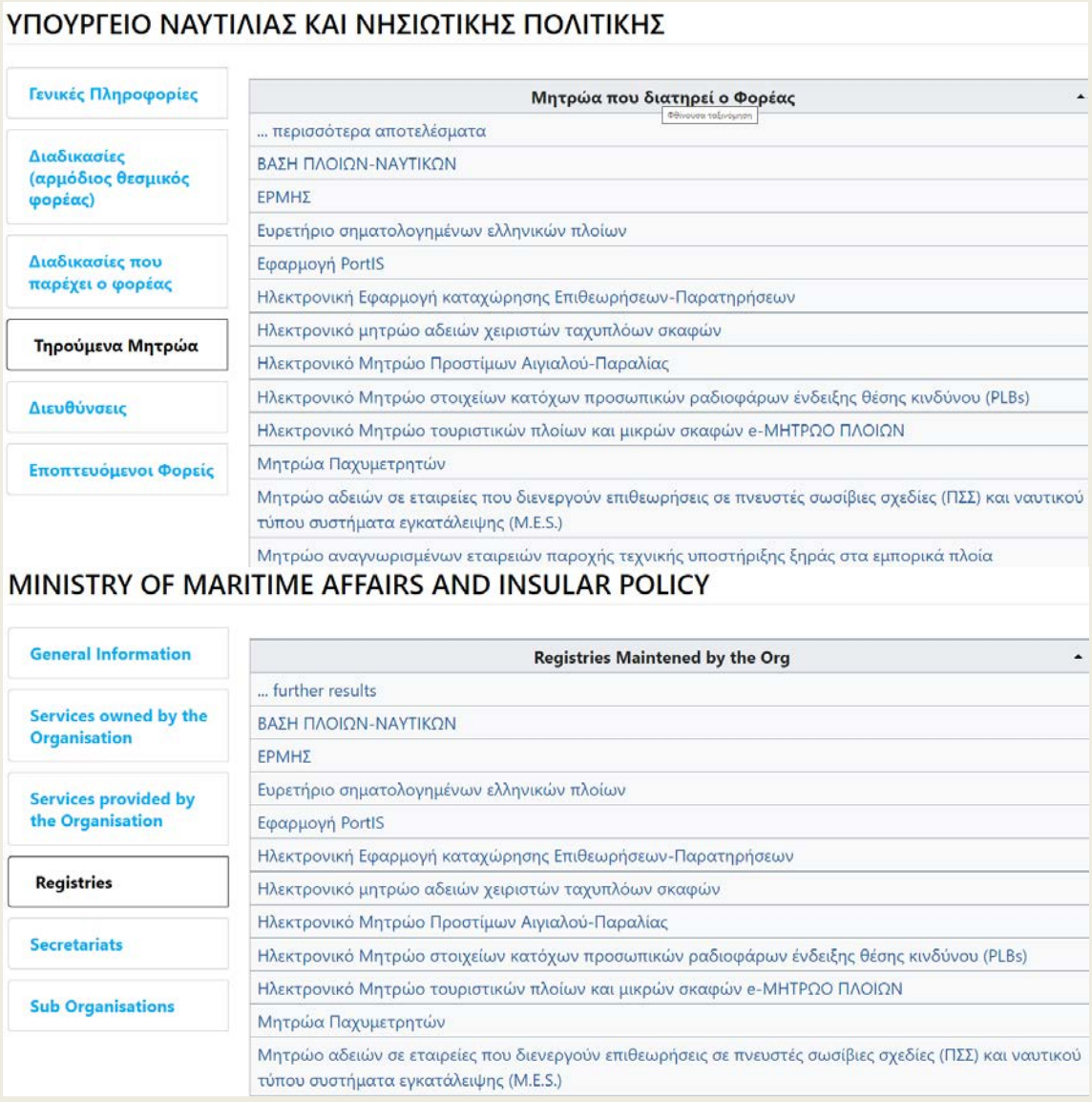
The content classified under this category contains information on the serial number, formal name, webpage, or contact details of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy. Data is also classified by the Procedures it owns (“Διαδικασίες”) – see Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3. Defined procedures



The registry is updated through these procedures (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. Updates based on the procedures



This constitutes a comprehensive data repository of interconnected information for the Greek administration, which can be used in a multitude of ways.

Source: (GOV.GR, 2022[1]).

Content management

Finding

Content management of an information website is a continuous process. Populating the content of effective government information websites often goes beyond the remit of the platform owner, given the scope of such websites covering administrative procedures throughout government. Structured collaboration processes can make content management more efficient and self-sustaining over time.

Recommendation

Consider the full scope of resource requirements for 1) populating the information website with key information across government at the time of its creation, 2) continuously updating the website throughout its lifecycle. This entails consideration of necessary governance or management structures, legal mandates, human resources, training and upskilling as well as coordination across the administration.

Actions for implementation

1. Set up a management / coordination structure for collecting information to populate the information website. Consider the specific roles and responsibilities of the website owner vs. the owners of administrative procedures (line ministries).
2. Ensure training of resources dedicated to manipulating the information website (e.g. content creation, content update, etc.).

Good practice examples

The Greek experience of setting up a management structure provides insights into how collaboration across the public administration can make content management of the information website more effective (see Box 1.2).

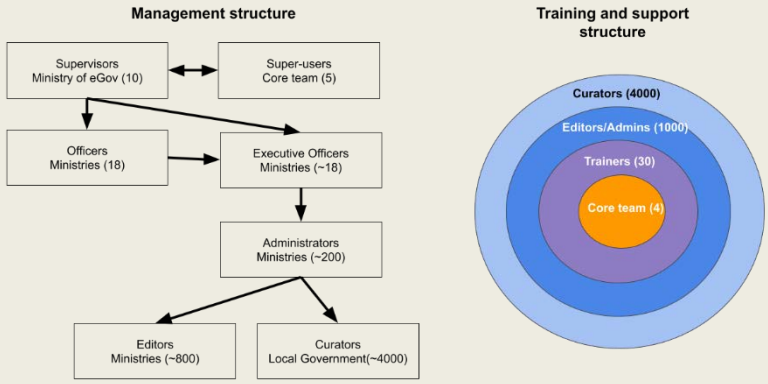
Box 1.2. Management model for content updates: evidence from the Greek National Registry of Administrative Procedures

An important characteristic of the Greek National Registry of Administrative Procedures is that employees throughout the public administration are in charge of content management of the website. This set-up allows first to collect and register all the procedures and services of the Greek public administration, and second, to continuously update the Registry. To operationalise this *modus operandi*, the law (L. 4727/2020, L. 4961/2022) and other regulations mandated the involvement of public administration in preparing and updating the content of the website.

The first step was to establish a concrete management structure with clear roles and responsibilities (see Figure 1.5). The structure establishes roles and responsibilities within the Ministry of Digital Governance, as well as within line Ministries. As the owner of the Registry, the Ministry of Digital Governance has the overall management responsibility for the website. Line ministries are expected to contribute according to pre-defined tasks and roles, and have responsibilities regarding content that pertains to their domain. This ensures that information provided in the platform comes as close as possible from the source, i.e. the entity in charge of a particular administrative procedure.

To ensure the continuous update of the information website, the Greek Registry relies on the support of a dedicated community of practice (Ruopp, 1993[2]) with the necessary training and rights to modify content on the website (Figure 1.5). By using a train-the-trainer model, and leveraging on champions across the public administration, the core team is able to ensure regular content update. In practice, 30 trainers have upskilled 1 000 editors/ admin, which in turn oversee the work of up to 4 000 curators.

Figure 1.5. The management and training structure of the project



Source: (GOV.GR, 2022[1]).

References

GOV.GR (2022), *Βρείτε τη δημόσια υπηρεσία που θέλετε εύκολα και γρήγορα*, https://www.gov.gr/. [1]

Ruopp, R. (1993), "LabNet: Toward a community of practice", *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, Vol. 2/1, pp. 305-319, https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00694594. [2]

2 Building blocks for effective information websites

This chapter addresses the main elements to be considered when implementing effective government information websites. It starts by providing insights into how to upgrade and improve the homepage and the search tool. It also focuses on practices to engage users in improving the website, the quality of its contents, and the service delivery. Finally, it presents useful information to implement a continuous improvement strategy.

Structure and use

Information websites are used by citizens to gather information on administrative processes, which can be complex at times. It is therefore essential to keep the website simple and easy to understand and navigate. The structure of the information website, the choice of design for the homepage and the robustness of the search tool can ensure that the user experience is smooth.

Homepage – Visually pleasant, comprehensive and easy-to understand

Finding

The homepage is a critical part of the information website. A complicated homepage with information overload can overwhelm a user and deter future use. Moreover, information needs to be standardised for the purposes of effectively feeding the website from different parts of the public administration.

Recommendation

The platform should have a homepage that is visually pleasant and easy-to-understand to enable all users to find the necessary information. It should include a search tool and a clear categorisation of information available. The structure of the information, i.e. the main categories proposed for quick/direct access, should correspond to situations/issues that are the most frequent or prominent for citizens' concerns and questions. These priorities should be defined based on available data and citizen/business consultations.

Actions for implementation

1. Design a **user-friendly homepage** enabling the user to get a quick overview of the information available, through:
    a. A well-presented list of key areas the platform can provide information on.
    b. A set of visual icons corresponding to the category of procedure/service to facilitate the identification of the appropriate service or information.
    c. A categorisation of processes/services for ease of navigation. When clicking on the category, the user is taken to a new webpage presenting, in a similar way, the services offered within that category and enabling the user to find the information relevant to their situation.
    d. An easy approach to the website's structure. This is indispensable to help users find easily what they need, avoid discouragement at excessive complexity or irrelevant information, and ensure that the portal rapidly gains in popularity and use.
    e. Use of life event categorisation or similar relevant categorisation. For example, "people with disabilities", "child and housing allowance", "health file" "medical care and hospitalisation" can be ordered within a broader "health and welfare" category. The ability to browse for services using a life-event categorisation has recently been adopted by the Greek portal for online digital services (GOV.GR, 2022[1]) and is also part of the YourEu portal (YourEurope, 2022[2]) and the French public service portal (ServicePublic, 2022[3]).
2. Specific rules to present the **structure** of the information provided by all actors involved in the website should be drafted. All the information should be drafted according to communication standards and avoid technical language when possible (use of citizen language). Concretely, this entails the following:
    a. Guidelines to produce contents should be drafted before the information is released.
    b. An oversight actor or body should review the adherence to the language guidelines and propose changes when needed.

3. The **search function should be clearly presented** to the user in the homepage (see Search tool – User-friendliness and effectiveness section for detailed explanations on the recommended design and gradual development of the search function). If possible, the search function can offer suggestions while typing, to help the user with formulating the request during the search. Suggestions while typing could correspond to keywords or to titles of specific pages or documents. The suggestions could correspond both to content pages, e.g. fact sheets or webpages, and to online services, if available. The search function is particularly critical, as it is often the main tool applied by users to navigate the portal.
4. Users should be able to **easily identify contact details and opening hours** of the administrative service locally responsible for a certain type of administrative process. The use of a geo-localisation function as used by the French national platform (see section on Finding the competent authority) can be added to help users locate administrative services responsible for administrative processes at local level.
5. The homepage should be designed in a way that it allows citizen users to look for information on processes **in languages other than the national language spoken in the country** (see section on Multi-language information). This would ensure that foreign nationals and businesses, or minority-language speakers residing in the country, are not disadvantaged and can find relevant information when needed – to promote integration, investment, business creation, and public trust.
    a. Additional languages shall be selected based on research (e.g. census) of the language communities present in the country, as well as the latest immigration and transnational investment trends.
    b. To ensure that public resources are spent efficiently, only certain parts of the website could be translated based on the target audience. For instance, critical procedures for foreign residents include dealing with immigration & residency, driving licenses, car registration, etc. The wide availability and good performance of automatic translation models[1] and tools for assisting the manual curation of machine translations, guarantee fast cycle of translation to other languages.

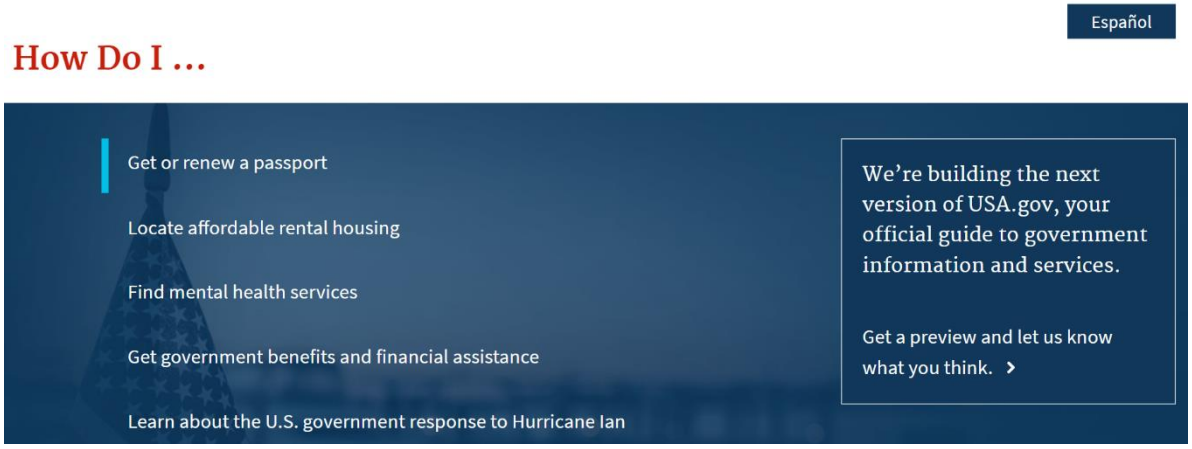
Good practice examples

User-friendly presentation of the homepage

The way a governmental information platform is designed should take into consideration the need to ensure that end-users understand its purpose and content, and can make use of it swiftly and easily. It is essential that the homepage presents information in a clear and concise manner. The opening pages from the information websites of the US (usa.gov), France (service-public.fr) and the UK (gov.uk) showcase different approaches to ensure a user-friendly presentation.

The US portal uses a terminology that is easy to understand. It clearly links to a short and clear description of what users “can do on this site”. It can also be displayed in Spanish (Figure 2.1).

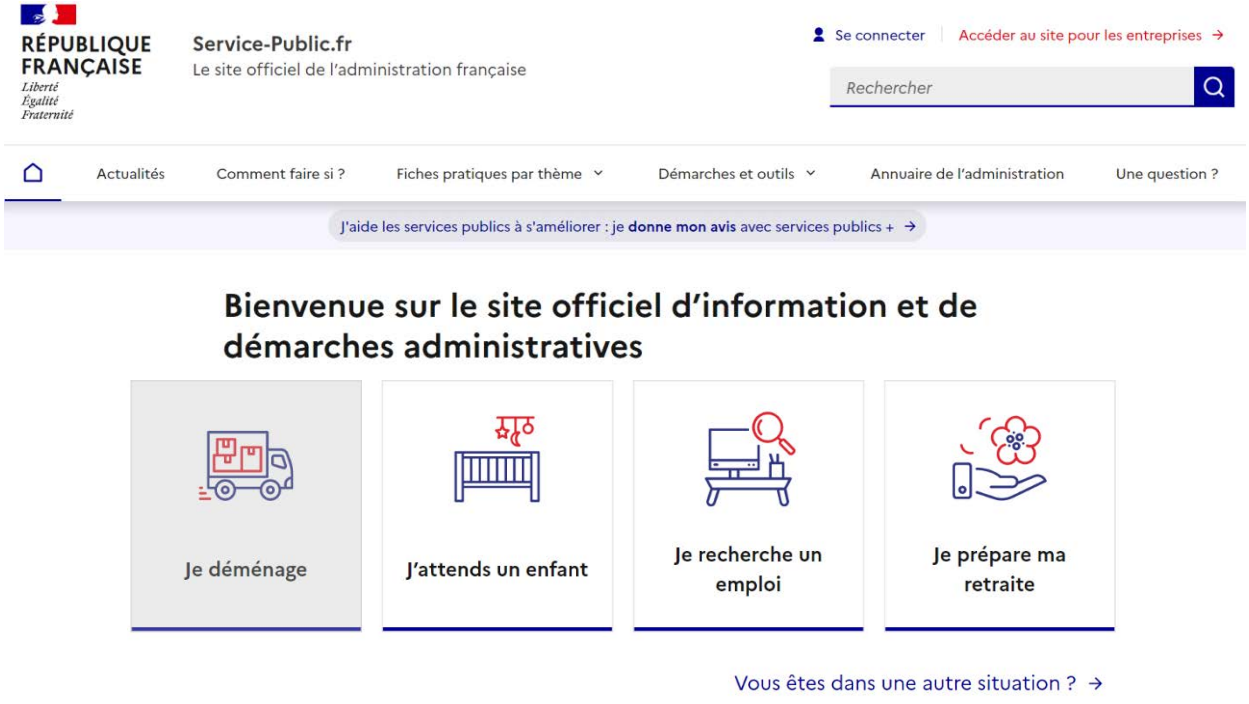
Figure 2.1. Snapshot of the national information portal deployed by the United States



Source: (USA.gov, 2022[4]).

The French portal uses life-event categorisation to guide users to relevant administrative procedures. These are displayed with visual icons (Figure 2.2). In addition, it includes several tabs that facilitate the navigation, including a "How to?" section, thematic fiches, and a section on procedures and tools. The portal serves primarily as an information website, but also has transactional functions for selected, simple procedures.

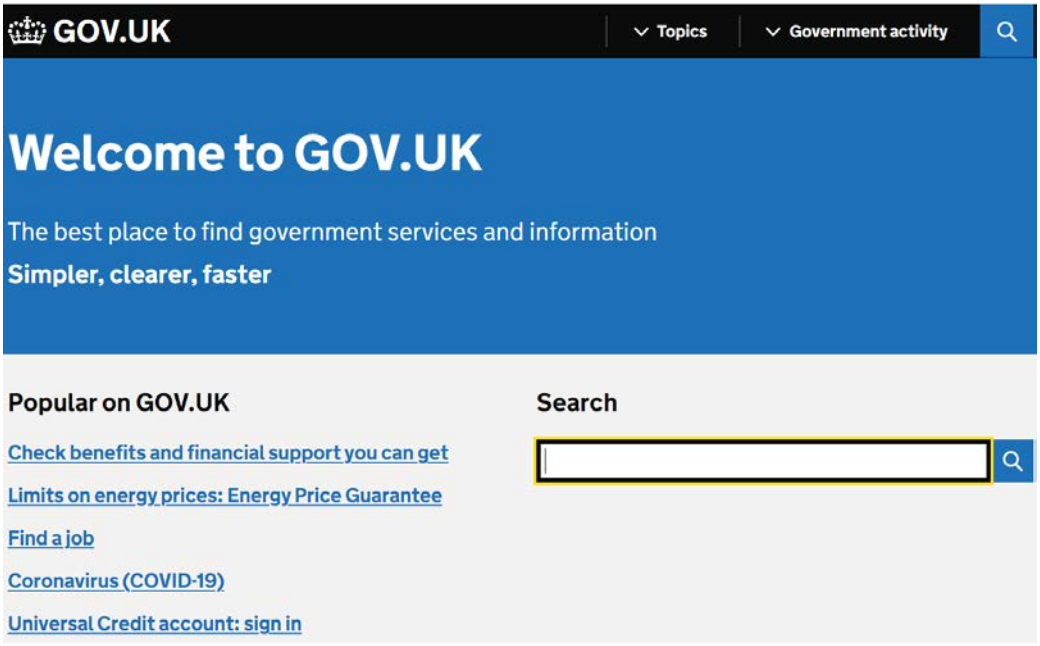
Figure 2.2. Snapshot of the national information portal deployed in France



Source: (ServicePublic, 2022[5]).

The homepage of the GOV.UK information website gives a concise description of its purpose ("the best place to find government services and information") and provides suggestions on popular themes, in addition to featuring a prominent search function (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Snapshot of the GOV.UK homepage



Source: (GOV.UK, 2022[6]).

Search function from the end-user perspective

An effective search tool is one that makes it possible for end-users to find the information they are looking for in an easy and straightforward way. Typically, the search tool will improve over time, as the search engine is gradually "trained". However, this should be seen as a key priority for the platform's development. One way to improve the training process is through the use of "guiding phrases". The search box can guide the user by having an opening phrase such as "*how can I*". This is useful because it can help engage the user with the search tool and from a technical perspective, collect requests in a homogenous fashion. Some examples of this function are:

- "How can I enrol my child in kindergarten?"
- "How can I transfer my residence?"

Box 2.1 provides the functions of the search tools in the French and British national websites.

Box 2.1. The search function from the end-user perspective

The examples below show how relevant search tools work in the French Public administration platform (ServicePublic, 2022[5]) and in the British one (GOV.UK, 2022[7]) from a citizen's or end-user's perspective.

French platform

- The user can select the type of end-user (citizen, professional or association).
- When typing the information sought in the search tool, suggestions are automatically proposed based on the keywords entered.
- Suggestions are divided into fact sheets, online services and websites. Based on the selection made by the end-user, the platform may direct the user to a different website.
- If the user prefers not to use the search tool, groups of easily understandable services illustrated by a simple icon, are also displayed on the homepage.

UK platform

The search function in GOV.UK is structured in a similar way

- Users can insert a word describing the administrative process/public service they are looking for in the search tool.
- There is also a list of categories of processes or services. When clicking on one category, a series of options (ordered alphabetically) open up in a new webpage.

Source: (ServicePublic, 2022[5]), (GOV.UK, 2022[7]).

Finding the competent authority

Citizens frequently need to have the possibility to contact the administration competent for a certain procedure, either to ask questions and get the assistance they need, or to take an appointment (e.g. for a procedure that has to be done in person).

The French Public Administration platform:

- displays email contact details related to the different procedures/services
- displays telephone numbers of relevant actors
- has a section of most frequently asked questions (FAQs) to help users navigate the portal.

Some information websites directly provide information on the closest contact points to the citizen.

The French Public Administration platform has a functionality that allows geo-localising available services in the administration directory. This allows citizens to directly find the contact details of services close to them (ServicePublic, 2022[8]) (ServicePublic, 2022[9]).

Multi-language information

Having information in multiple languages, and making them easy to find (e.g. accessible from the homepage or at least from a section's main page) can be beneficial to those citizens who are not nationals of the country they reside in, or belong to linguistic minorities.

Figure 2.4 shows an example drawn from the regional website of the public administration in Tuscany (Italy) that can serve as an example of what a multilingual information administrative services webpage can look like.

Figure 2.4. Multilingual informative sheets

Source: (Regione Toscana, 2022[10]).

Similarly, Luxembourg's information website Guichet.lu also provides information in multiple languages (English, German and French), reflecting the multi-linguistic population and the high influx of workers from different nationalities (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5. Languages available in the Luxembourg's information website Guichet.lu

Source: (Guichet.lu, 2022[11]).

Search tool – User-friendliness and effectiveness

Finding

A search tool is computer software used to search (probe) for data (such as a text or a set of documents) in the pursuit to acquire specific information or processes. In the case of a government information website on administrative procedures, the search tool should look through the platform's contents to find information that is relevant, considering the terms entered by the user. The key challenge is to yield search results with not just pages or documents that contain the terms in question, but those that are specifically relevant for the user.

Having a user-friendly and effective search tool will contribute to better understanding and use of public services. Consequently, an enhanced system will provide transparency and generate greater trust between citizens and authorities.

Recommendation

While developing the search tool, it should be kept in mind that the purpose is to facilitate the end-user and provide him/her with the necessary information in an easy and user-friendly manner. Hence, the software of the tool should be designed accordingly, namely in a way that user queries find relevant information.

Actions for implementation

1. Information websites should contain a proper **document management system** to handle the information it will hold, and this provides an ideal avenue for improvement of the search function. Indeed, for each "document" (be it an actual "document" or a webpage), the document management system should enable to record a series of key words, which then enable the search function to link this document with the terms searched. This functionality can be gradually developed, but it needs to be a core objective from the beginning.
2. Improvements of the search function will require **regular analysis** of most frequent searches, and of user satisfaction (which the platform should collect feedback about), and successive navigation from the initial result (see Box 2.2). It is also recommended that citizens / end-users be involved, directly through consultation, to provide input into what they typically search for and how, and on the effectiveness of the search tool. The purpose remains for this tool to be beneficial to the largest number of potential users.
3. When developing a search tool, it is essential to consider the perspective, the need and the envisaged results of the end-user. When designing the search tool and populating its analytics and algorithms, it is essential to remember that the target audience is the end-user, and in that spirit, the end-users' needs should be met, which may differ from the need of the developer of the tool or administrator of the information provided in the tool. The latter generally has more expertise in the domain. Consequently, there may be a disconnect between "how" searches are performed by non-experts, compared to public administration officials, and this is why *non-expert* input is essential.
4. When a user is looking for information on an administrative procedure, a simple text search may not present the desired output or result. One reason for this could be not knowing the exact search term, i.e. the name of the procedure.
    a. One way to fix this is to have a comprehensive autocomplete list, which can produce "hits" based on analytics and algorithms from previous searches.
    b. Another option could be to lead the user to an advanced search or giving the user an option to enter the process ID of the desired procedure.

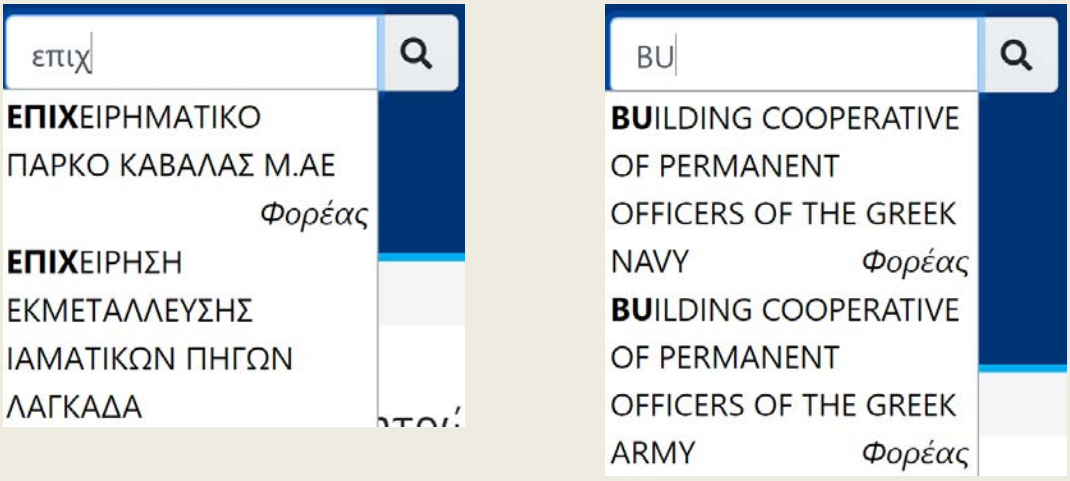
Good practice examples

The Greek national platform currently employs the latter two methods to enable searches (see Box 2.2).

Box 2.2. Search function of the Greek Registry

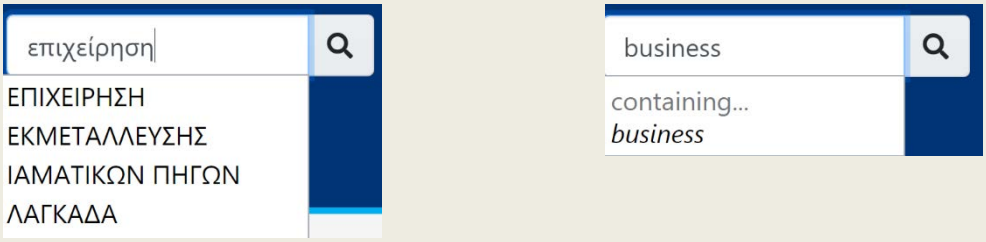
Step 1: The user is looking for "Επιχείρηση" (Business), but the autocomplete works until "Επιχ" since it matches a procedure on "Επιχορήγηση…" (subsidy). See Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6. Autocomplete functionality of the search function of the Greek registry



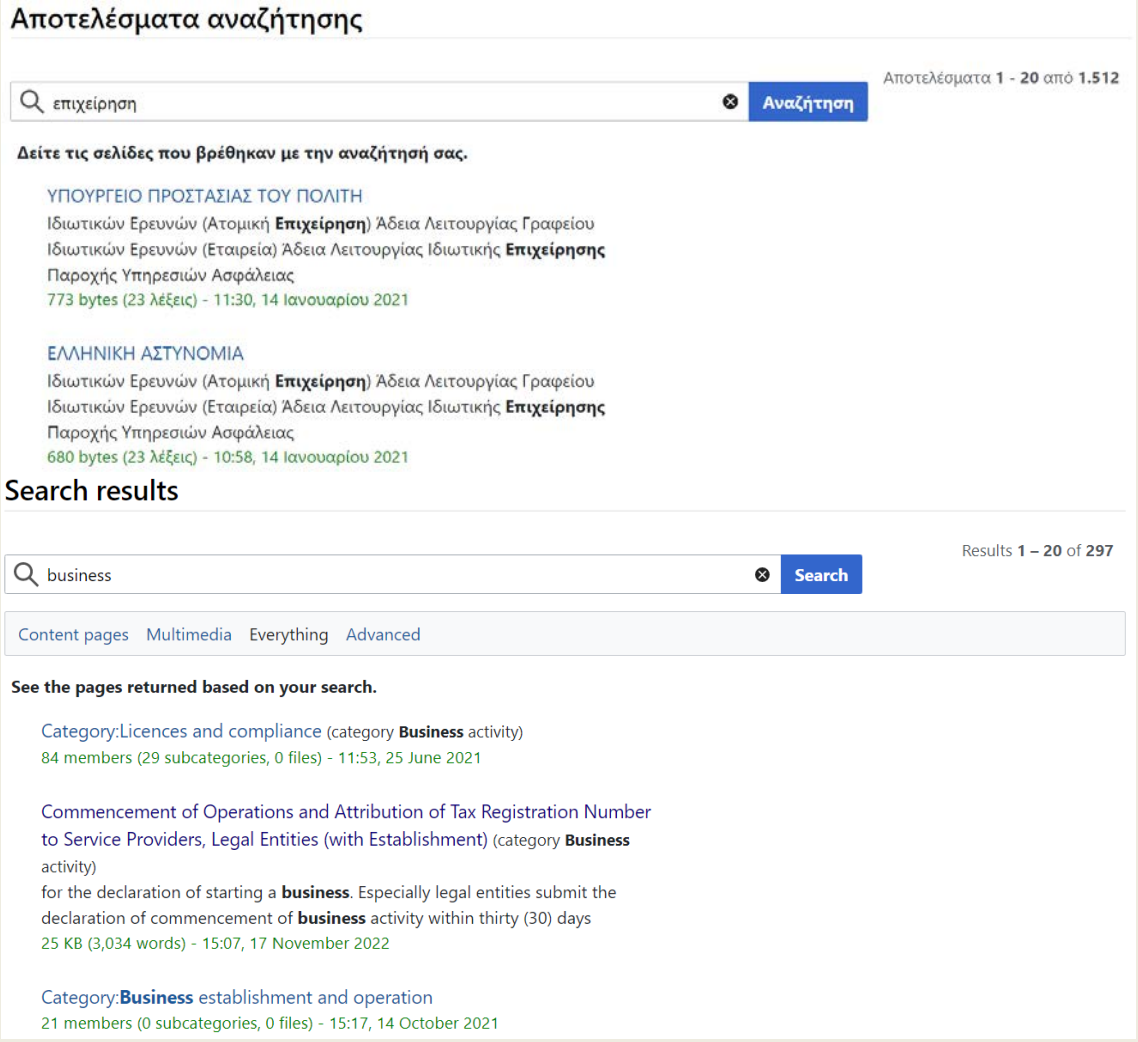
Step 2: However, there is an option to advance search for results that contain (περιέχει…) the query term, as shown below. See Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.7. Advance searching functionality of the Greek registry



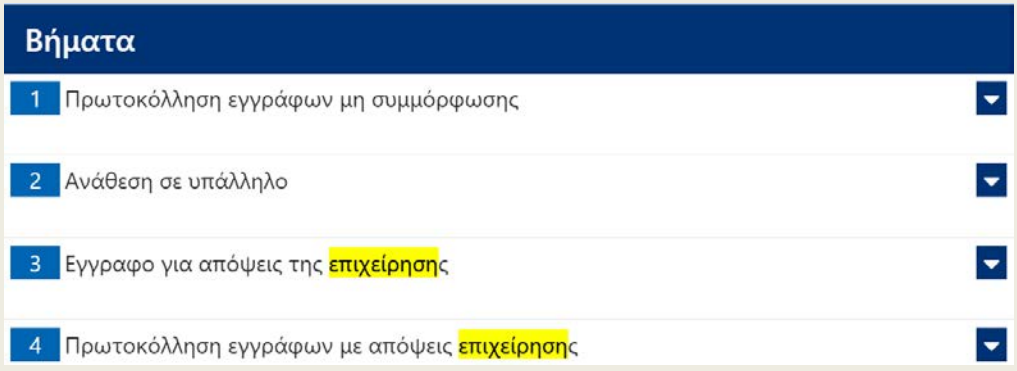
Step 3: In the retrieved results, the search term does not appear in the title of the procedure. In fact, the user does not need to type in the precise wording or search term to retrieve relevant results. See Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8. Preliminary results of the searching function of the Greek registry



Step 4: Some of the results have similar stems in the title. If a user were to click on the first link the search term appears several times within the page. See Figure 2.9.

Figure 2.9. Visual support of the searching function of the Greek registry



Description

The procedure concerns the issuance of a license to companies for the priming of firearm cartridges (except those for hunting) and then to their trading, provided that the conditions provided for by other provisions are established and the operation of these companies and the trading license has been issued. Aimed at businesses.

Basic information

Related links

Competent body

MINISTRY OF CITIZEN PROTECTION

Authority responsible for the provision of the procedure

HELLENIC POLICE

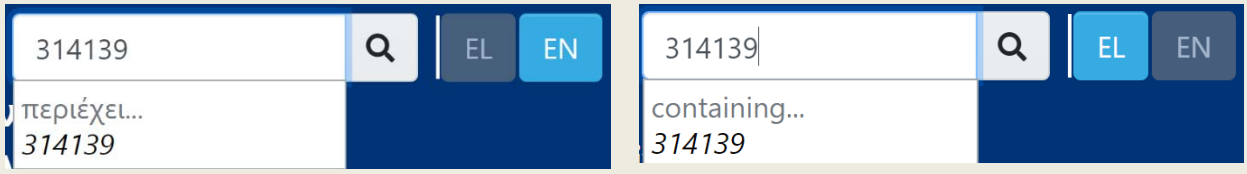
Provided to

Businesses

Note: The website layout for the Greek and English versions may slightly vary.
Source: (mitos.gov.gr, 2022[12]) (mitos.gov.gr, 2022[13]);

Users can also search using the procedure ID. See Figure 2.10.

Figure 2.10. ID procedure of the searching function of the Greek registry



Source: (GOV.GR, 2022[14]).

Search tool – User involvement for search tool design

Finding

Effective tools are designed with the end-user in mind. However, too often, search tools are based on the internal organisation's needs, terminology, and acronyms, which may not be clear for end-users. Good practices across the world suggest that effectiveness of a search tool requires a simplified process and focus for the end-user.

Recommendation

Involve citizens and end-users early in the design phase. This step is critical to ensure that the software is capable of deciphering human queries and input effectively, including using appropriate language.

Actions for implementation

1. In order to **determine the formulations mostly used by end-users** when seeking services from the government administration, it is recommended to conduct a survey amongst citizens and other end-users. This step will clarify the terminology used by citizens and will make clear where and how the general public differs from public officials in how they refer to different procedures, life events, etc.
2. In order to **conduct a survey** or **focus groups** that are reliable, and representative of the citizens, they will need to be performed using a methodology which will consider the appropriate criteria.
    a. For example, it will be necessary to determine the characteristics of the sample, the number of citizens to be polled/involved, to ensure that it is representative of society, considering elements such as gender, age group, location.
    b. It is important to address the issue of the responsible body of the survey and/or focus groups, meaning who will be responsible for conducting the survey, how will the survey be performed (in-person/phone interview/ online questionnaire/ written questionnaire other social media outlets), who will have access to the data compiled, who will analyse and report on the data.
    c. If, before the introduction of the tool, the citizen's search for information was done in person at public offices or governmental service counters or by phone, one could take advantage of this contact to interview the citizens and/or the public officials in order to recognise the terminology used when the citizen requests the information.
3. **Digital solutions** can be implemented within the information websites in order to obtain information about users' experience.

Good practice examples

To support user involvement, governments can engage in extensive public consultations that take into account user-centred design research. For instance, the government of Australia adopted an extensive public consultation process on the future of employment services in the wake of digitalisation and changes in the labour market. This involved consultations over 23 roundtables and community forums, as well as user-centred design research involving 550 people, among other practices (Welby and Hui Yan Tan, 2022[15]).

The region of Tuscany in Italy has put in place an information website that is structured in a simple way that allows for easy identification of relevant contents. It also makes use of plain language instead of applying the jargon of the public administration (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. Simple language and user-friendly identification of contents in Tuscany

The search tool should enable citizens to perform research and look for information about procedures and/or services on a web platform in an easy, understandable, and straightforward way. The example of the regional website of the public administration in Tuscany (Italy) shows some ideas about the structure and language used for end-users to navigate the platform. The search tool presents a list of key areas that, if clicked on, open a further menu presenting the different procedures within that category and enabling the identification of a given procedure.

Here the user can decide to look for procedures related to "entry routes and stay" and "life events". This more practical way of approaching the topics can be of particular help to individuals who are not very familiar with the language or with administrative procedures.

The Italian national information portal categorises functions into life events. It is possible to choose the status of the end-user: non-EU or stateless, new EU member states national, or EU citizen (general case). After selecting for example, the “non-EU citizen” category, the platform shows a list of different types of life events that might be of interest to the end-user, including work, open a company, have a family, stay in Italy for a long period, study, get economic aids etc.

The language that is used is relatively simple and very different from typical public administration jargon that could represent an obstacle for end-users of the platform. When clicking on the categories if the end-user is interested in a new ‘menu’ containing a more specific list of information, he/ she gets an overview of the processes contained in the new menu. For instance, the option (life event), “have a family” opens up more specific related processes: family reunification, children, spouse, parents etc. This way, the end-user can easily find in an intuitive fashion the procedure he/she is interested in and identify the relevant information.

Source: (Regione Toscana, 2022[16]).

Search tool – Full-text search functionalities

Finding

For a website that collects information on processes and documents, it is necessary to have a valid tool for full-text searching, both on the pages of the site and within the documents themselves (e.g. pdf). Essentially, information websites need to contain an indexing engine that allows searches within attachments, and the management of metadata profiles for each document.

Recommendation

Adopt a platform that allows for search of webpages and within documents (in various formats such as pdf, doc, etc.), both by content / thematic categorisation and by associated metadata.

Actions for Implementation

It is recommended to choose a **software platform that can provide** this support (i.e. **search of pages and documents by content and associated metadata**).

1. Potential software solutions include e.g. Alfresco or Documentum (see Box 2.4).
2. Document software using powerful engines for indexing and searching content also include Apache Solr and Elasticsearch which quickly return pages (including service pages, procedures and other informational pages) that contain the search terms, with partial (stem) or full matching
3. There are also practical and effective cloud solutions, such as Amazon CloudSearch and Microsoft Azure Search.

Good practice examples

Several software solutions offer ways to conduct effective searches within documents (see Box 2.4).

Box 2.4. Software solutions for effective document searches

Several aspects can characterise documents by associating sets of metadata corresponding to different domains such as author information, geo-referencing information, photographic characteristics (such as exposure time and aperture), etc.

It is possible to define aspects with customised metadata, which indexing tools can understand and use to improve search efficiency. Software available for this purpose is extensive and several options provide quality results. For example, some software options use powerful engines for indexing and searching content. Practical and effective cloud solutions can also be considered.

One or more customised aspects to be applied to the documents should be studied and implemented, in order to optimise them for indexing and search engines. For instance, metadata describing the type (e.g., “self-declaration” or “registration code”) and scope (e.g., “work”, “social assistance”, “family”), etc. could be included.

Usually, this type of tool also allows the management of versioning, allowing one to keep an eye on changes from one version to another of the same document.

Source: (Alfresco, 2022[17]).

Use of help desk in combination with information website

Finding

When a citizen / end-user cannot find or interpret or understand the information on the website, they often resort to contacting the telephone helpdesk. When an end-user contacts the administrative body to seek clarification or assistance, this is an opportunity for the administrative body to explore the potential difficulties in the search tool. This opportunity will allow the government body to ascertain the terminology used by the end-user when formulating the request and as such will allow the government body to evaluate the reasons the search was unsuccessful or non-efficient. As the platform improves, based on the feedback from citizens, the help desk/ line will notice a reduction in calls seeking assistance.

Recommendation

Implement a help desk (phone and chat) to help citizens find information on the platform. Use the feedback from the help desk to improve the information website, including the search function.

Actions for implementation

1. In order to provide the necessary assistance and be able to collect the data to continue improving the tool, choose a help-desk tool capable of collecting data and producing **statistical analysis**.
2. Carefully define the organisation of the **help desk** needed to support the use of the information portal. For example, consideration should be given to the potential capacity of units with respect to telephone lines, operators, call agents, data protection and the use of data to improve the platform.

Analytics tools to strengthen information websites

Finding

By using web analytics tools, it is possible to trace the navigation flow of visitors, and to identify the paths that lead to the information requested. This information can also be used to study the difficulties and "failure points" of navigation through the site content. Finally, analytics can provide valuable insights about the various platform components (MediaWiki, API, Feedback forms) and their usability, and can also provide a continuous reporting on the progress of the population of the information portal and the update of its contents.

Recommendation

Adopt web analytics tools to better understand trends and developments in visitor navigation.

Actions for implementation

It is recommended to conduct a thorough review in order to select the **most appropriate web analytics tool**. Although there are several alternatives, they should be compliant with privacy and data protection regulations. The main objective remains the importance of creating reports and analysing the results periodically by a search engine optimisation (SEO) expert.

Further engagement, outreach, and assistance

While numerous jurisdictions have already taken a lead in digitisation of government services with the objective to facilitate and benefit their citizens, communicating these strategies and changes is essential in order to achieve the results sought. It is recommended to take steps to promote the use and ensure confidence in the information platform. By continually engaging users to improve the platform, the quality, and the service delivery through different means such as stakeholder meetings, assessments, evaluation forms or feedback etc., users will be more confident in using these services.

Prior to launch engagement

Finding

For the information platform to be successful and for the citizens to feel that the platform was created with them in mind, and so they can perform the necessary searches successfully, citizens should be engaged in the overall process (in addition/complementarily to the design of the search tool – see Search tool – User involvement for search tool design above).

Recommendation

Promoting the engagement with different stakeholders for the testing of the platform before being launched can ensure its accountability and promote different interests in the development of the platform.

Actions for implementation

If feasible, it may be useful to **create partnerships** with national and local administrations, business and target group associations, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions to conduct testing for several purposes: a) verify the correctness of information and b) improve end-user experience over time.

Communication strategy throughout the process

Finding

A communication strategy is essential to ensure that end-users are aware of the existence of the platform, its objectives and how it can be used. This includes updated information on any changes related to the platform and administrative processes (e.g. simplification of a process, changes in supporting documents, etc.) The communication strategy takes place via a variety of tools (e.g. an electronic newsletter and bulletins alongside social media outlets) set up to enable citizens to be up to date with any administrative change and contribute to an increase in public trust.

Recommendation

Effectively communicating to users (e.g. through newsletters, bulletins and easily available information) to allow users to engage with the information portal and ensure confidence. See relevant best practice in Box 2.5.

Actions for implementation

1. Design an **outreach campaign**(s) aimed at informing the public and target groups about the existence, purpose, and utilisation of the information platform.
2. Use a variety of tools (e.g. an electronic newsletter and bulletins alongside a Facebook webpage – or other social media outlets) to **enable citizens to be up to date with any administrative change** and contribute to an increase in public trust.

Good practice examples

Several platforms make use of various communication channels to keep users updated (see Box 2.5).

Box 2.5. Information and communication

The UK platform GOV.UK offers users the possibility to get emails about updates on specific topics (e.g. money, children, or education), webpages (e.g. news about certain departments, agencies), foreign travel advice webpages as well as news and communication.

Both the UK and the French websites have a Facebook page information presenting the latest developments and procedures in an easily understandable and graphically appealing way.

Source: (GOV.UK, 2022[7]) (ServicePublic, 2022[5]).

Features to assist users

Finding

International practices suggest that government information websites do not only inform users, citizens and businesses about the services rendered, but also assist them in the administrative procedures and practical information in a simple, user-friendly manner.

Recommendation

Information websites should include features that facilitate assistance to end-users.

Actions for implementation

1. Including a **Contact Us feature**. This should be up-to-date and should provide a source of reassurance to the citizen that they can be assisted in the search for information.
2. Providing a list of most frequently asked questions (**FAQs**) to enable a better understanding of the platform's functioning and services. This could be set up in cooperation with the different national bodies contributing to the platform.
3. Setting up a call centre, a chat assistant, an email service (with service delivery targets) where **users can directly contact** the administration if they encounter any difficulty during the process. See in particular the finding "Use of help desk in combination with information website" above.

Continuous improvement of the information website

Effective government information websites need to be conceived as dynamic tools if they are to provide value for citizens over time. This entails considerations of continuous improvement and gradual updates.

Assessment for continuous and gradual upgrade

Finding

International experience shows that good practice websites are the result of years of continuous improvement and gradual upgrade of relevant tools and functionalities, based on the objectives of the platform (i.e. websites are not an objective per se, but tools to achieve regulatory goals). No platform was born perfectly-fit-for-purpose. Improvements implemented are based on technological advancements, but also on the input received from different stakeholders and target groups.

Recommendation

Periodically assess the need for improvements and upgrades, based on technical advancements, feedback from citizens, end-users and stakeholders, and objectives underlying the implementation of the information portal.

Actions for implementation

1. Regularly **assess the performance of the information portal** based in particular on the following:
   a. See findings from the sections Use of help desk in combination with information website and Analytics tools to strengthen information websites.
   b. Indicators such as satisfaction of end-users and stakeholders, time spent in understanding how to undergo administrative procedures, number of visits, etc.
   c. Speed and quality of the tools and technologies used
   d. Research of new and alternative solutions
2. Based on the assessment, **consider improvements** based in particular on the below. Furthermore, an agile approach can contribute to continuous learning and improvement (OECD, 2020[18]).
   a. Benchmarking against international good practice
   b. Expert advice

c. Input from end-users and other stakeholders (i.e. continually engaging users to improve the platform and the quality of the platform so as to ensure that the use of the platform has attained its main goal) – through different means such as stakeholder meetings, assessments, evaluation forms, surveys, emails and feedback links.

d. Cost-benefit analysis of possible upgrades.

Good practice examples

Continuous improvements have ensured the success of the French platform service-public.fr (see Box 2.6). Several platforms are making use of feedback forms to collect information about potential improvements (see Box 2.7).

Box 2.6. Recipes for success can take time: service-public.fr – evolution over time

The French experience shows that by implementing a continuous improvement process the Service-Public.fr website has been able to efficiently meet the needs of the citizens. The strategy was based on the improvement of functionalities and tools (in particular the search function), feedback from end users and information collected for the purpose to gradually upgrade the design and use of the platform.

The brief history below shows that the use of the platform has been increasing along with substantial improvements implemented.

- **2000: launch** of https://www.service-public.fr/.
- **2004: 26.4 million visits**. 91 000 subscribers to the electronic newsletter.
- **2007**: redesign of the “space for professionals”.
- **2012: 143.5 million visits.** Public site of the year award.
- **2014: launch of the simplification project** aimed at merging the four existing sites (service-public, mon-service-public, mon-compte-pro and mon-compte-asso) with the takeover by the Directorate of Legal and Administrative information (DILA) of the mon-service-public.fr site and the online procedures for the public operated by the Directorate General for State Modernization (DGME).
- **2015: launch of a new version of Service-public.fr** (new ergonomics and technical architecture, new graphics, editorial changes): the site reaches 285.5 million visits, 25% of which through mobile.
- **2016: launch of the new merged* service-public.fr** site based on the online services platform (PSL), which replaces the DGME's MDEL platform (Mes démarches en ligne).
- **2018: deployment of new online services**, including electoral list registration.
- **2019**: Service-public.fr exceeds 300 million visits.
- **2020**: Service-public celebrates its 20th anniversary and records more than 350 million visits by the end of October 2020.

Source: (ServicePublic, 2022[5]).

Box 2.7. Feedback and improvement

Involving end-users in the improvement of the portal is crucial to allow governments to assess the quality of the platform and ensure that it achieves its intended goal(s).

The French Administrative services platform **Service Public +** shows that citizens can be encouraged to the following:

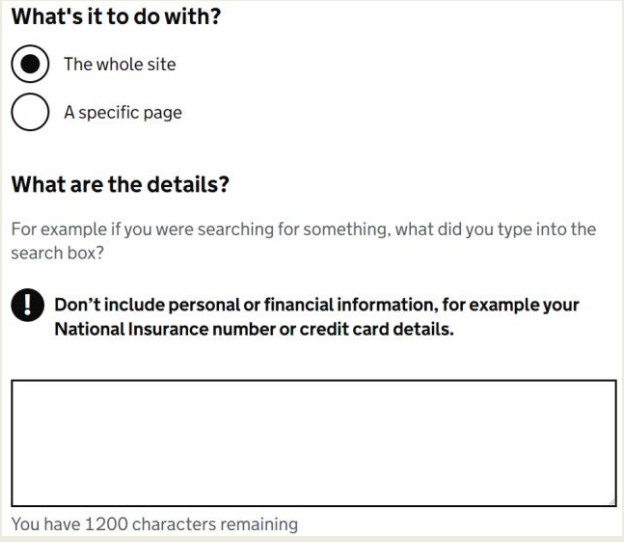
- contributing to the improvement of the services (e.g. providing feedback about their experience, positive or negative, and being informed on other users' experience)
- indicating administrative documents that are too complicated (through the platform citizens etc. can send the document and explain why it is difficult to understand)
- checking the quality outcomes of citizen-facing public services (via online surveys aimed at enhancing the transparency on the efficiency and quality of public services).

The British Public Administration platform makes it possible to users to contact the GOV.UK team (Figure 2.11) to:

- ask a question
- report a problem
- suggest an improvement

Further details are then asked to the end-user who can describe the situation in an online form. The user can also ask the administration to get back to him/her by leaving the email address.

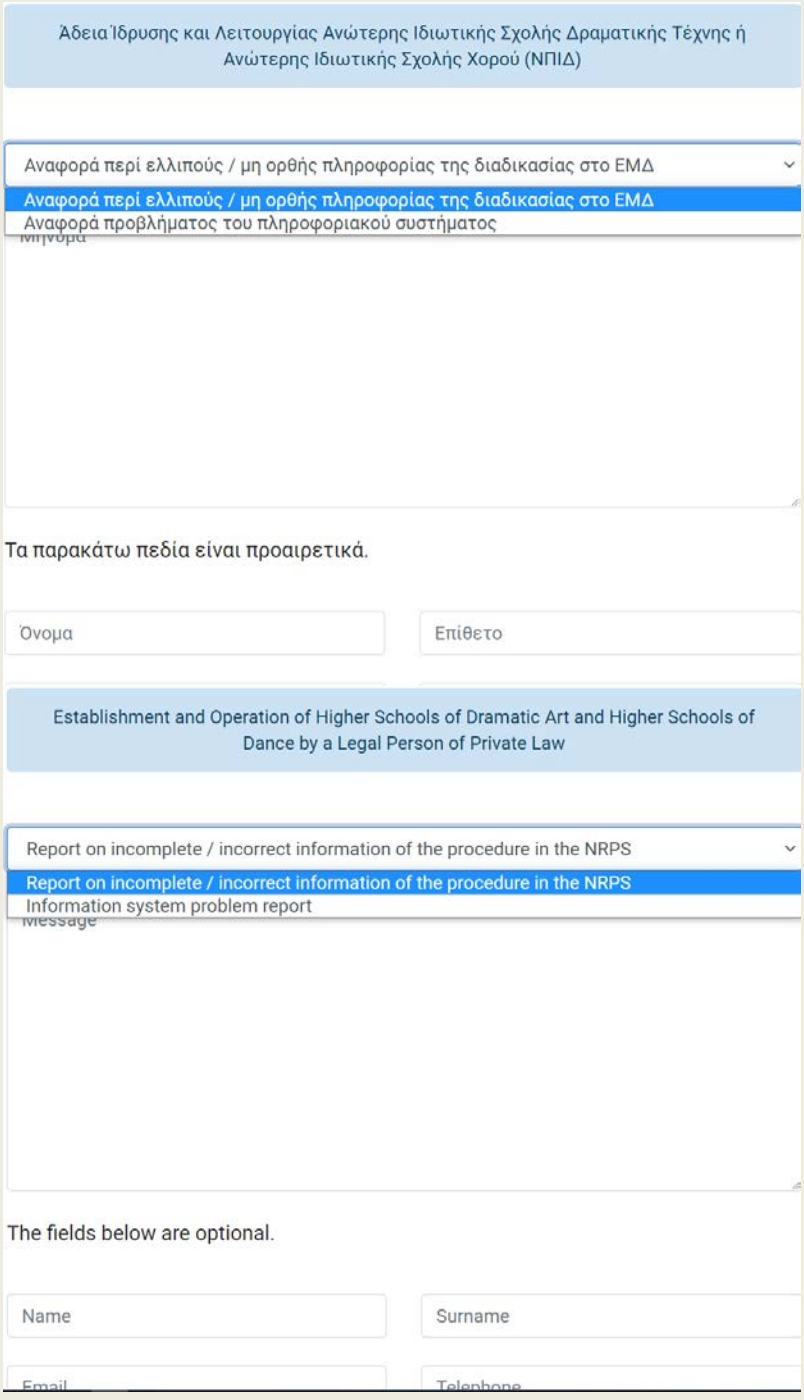
Figure 2.11. Form for issues to do with the GOV.UK website



Source: https://www.gov.uk/contact/govuk.

The Greek Registry has also integrated the ability of its users (public administration employees and citizens) to provide feedback on the registered services (see Figure 2.12). A feedback form is available on every service and allows users to provide feedback (optionally sharing their contact details) on issues related to the metadata of the services, or suggestions on improvements or simplification of the service. They can also provide suggestions and report issues about the platform itself.

Figure 2.12. Form to provide feedback to the Greek public services website



Source: (ServicePublic, 2022[5]) (GOV.UK, 2022[7]) (GOV.GR, 2022[14]).

Note

[1] Examples for machine translation include FastText, i.e. a machine translation model for translating from English and is already available in many languages. BERT is another tool which can provide with prediction support. Though it does not translate text, it can predict the next word based on the context of the previous text.

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3 Upgrading informational portals

This section provides recommendations to enhance information websites with tools aimed at facilitating communication and interaction with citizens. This includes adopting enhanced functionalities and increasing usability of websites. Governments can also consider upgrading information website to transactional portals.

This section provides further suggestions on functionalities that governments may consider for future upgrades, including the enhancement of the search tool and the increased usability of information websites through development of mobile-friendly versions. Governments could also consider the implementation of service delivery functionalities via transactional portals as a major step up of information websites.

Upgrades to enhance functionalities and usability

Advanced technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence are providing increased opportunities to enhance information website, and in particular to strengthen the search function. Furthermore, governments need to ensure that access to information is available via the most effective channels of communication. Increasingly, citizens make use of portable devices such as mobile phones or tablets to access any kind of online information. Hence, governments could consider creating mobile-friendly websites as part of a strategy to increase usability.

Virtual assistants as natural evolution of search boxes

Finding

The natural evolution of search boxes (see Chapter 2, Structure and Use) are virtual assistants, commonly called chat-bots. These tools allow the end-user to perform a search by asking a question directly, rather than just typing in search terms. Furthermore, in the case of chat-bots, information about interactions that did not lead to visitor satisfaction can be used for supervised learning and improvement.

Recommendation

Develop a virtual assistance tool to improve the end-user experience on the information website. Ensure that virtual assistance tool incorporate advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to continuously improve search results.

Actions for implementation

1. Develop a chat box based on:
    a. Decision trees, keyword recognition, or through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML).
    b. The use of AI and ML foresees the processing of data starting from a list of “intents” of the visitor (it could be the search for information related to administrative procedures subsequent to a specific life event) and sets of potential questions and answers. The training of the chat box will lead it to be able to contextualise the visitor’s question and propose the appropriate answer.
2. Ensure that transparency and accountability mechanisms are taken into account given their critical importance to secure a trustworthy adoption of AI in the public sector. This includes taking into account the OECD’s Recommendation on Artificial Intelligence (OECD, 2022[1]) and the OECD’s Good Practice Principles for Data Ethics in the Public Sector (OECD, 2021[2]).

Good practice examples

Numerous portals allow a virtual assistant to be implemented without major technological and economic investments. The effectiveness of a chat-bot is directly dependent on the information available for its training. The information gathered in the search tool design phase (see subsection on ‘Search tool – User

involvement for search tool design') and from the analysis of searches (see subsection on 'Use of help desk in combination with information website' and 'Analytics tools to strengthen information websites') can therefore form the basis of know-how enabling the chat-bot to understand the intentions of the visitor and respond in a correct and relevant manner.

Development of a mobile friendly website

Finding

The use of portable devices such as smartphone and tablets is becoming ubiquitous and includes the search for information related to government services. The accessibility and usability of information websites would increase with mobile-friendly versions.

Recommendation

Launch a mobile version for government information websites or transactional portals to increase real access for government service users.

Actions for implementation

1. Consider the changes or quality controls necessary to transition from desktop to a mobile portal in order to make the navigation experience and accessibility friendlier for these devises.
2. Ensure a "mobile by design" website development using responsive layouts that use the same URL and the same code irrespective of the device from which the website is being accessed. Typically, a responsive layout website development is more cost- and time-effective compared to the creation of a dedicated mobile website.

Transactional service delivery portal

A potential evolution of information websites is the upgrade to a transactional service delivery portal. The key challenge when developing transactional websites is to ensure that they effectively can replace existing processes and/or interface with existing systems. They should be user-friendly and reliable. In fact, it is highly desirable to develop a strategy to ensure that procedures and formalities are as simple as possible before digitalisation. If governments fail to simplify processes before digitalising, the outcome may be the digitalisation of an already-existing bureaucratic system. Moreover, cumbersome administrative procedures may appear even more frustrating online, as citizens have no means to ask for in-person advice.

Often governments start with the creation of information website before embarking in the more complex task of setting up of a transactional portal. An incremental approach might bring the advantage of gathering learnings from the experience of implementing the information website prior to upgrading to an even more dynamic tool. Namely, service delivery functionalities can be added to the information website, gradually turning it into a transactional portal.

Upgrade to a transactional portal

Finding

An increasing number of countries have created transactional portals (or e-portals) whereby citizens can obtain information and receive several services, for example, perform business transactions, receive

services such as renewal of driver's licenses, apply for official documentation such as birth certificates, pay dues, fines, or taxes, or create different forms of business entities.

Recommendation

Consider implementing service delivery functionalities for certain processes, on a gradual basis. Ensure confidence in the portal and provide privacy to the users with respect to their confidential information and personal data.

Actions for implementation

1. Carefully consider which processes and service delivery functionalities can/should be introduced and piloted – based e.g. on the Methodology for Rapid Identification of Reform Priorities, and on existing or foreseen tools from competent authorities.
   a. The portal can be designed so that the user can first identify him/herself as an individual, business or association, and after which a series of different information are displayed in the homepage.
   b. The portal can be available in multiple versions, each of which customised via a single identifier and password to enable the user to meet his/her specific needs.
2. Ensure that the **processing of personal data** is carried out in accordance with the relevant regulations on protection of data and that end-users are duly informed on the measures taken in this regard (see Security of online government services).

Good practice examples

User-friendly identification of available online procedures

The ServiceOntario (Ontario, Canada) portal clearly lists the different categories of procedures. Those that can be performed online are visibly indicated (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. List of procedures that can be performed on the ServiceOntario website

Source: (ServiceOntario, 2022[3]).

Similarly, Luxembourg provides an integrated user-experience through its information website GUICHET.LU and its transactional version MYGUICHET.LU (both available in mobile version) (see Figure 3.2). The two sites serve as single entry point for citizens, businesses and migrants to access online public services with a recognisable brand for service delivery (OECD, 2022[4]).

Figure 3.2. Integrated user experience of information website and transactional portal in Luxembourg

Source: (Myguichet.lu, 2022[5]).

Service Delivery portals often apply customised access based on the typology of the user. This enables to improve the portal experience from an end-user's perspective – this way end-users have access to information and services related specifically to their characteristics and needs.

In Alberta (Canada) a personal account for online procedures enables all citizens to perform administrative procedures online using a single identifier and password (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Personal account for online procedures in Alberta

Source: (My Alberta Digital ID, 2022[6]).

Security of online government services

As Service Delivery portals involve processing of personal data of users, relevant platforms should ensure that necessary measures are taken to ensure that this is done in accordance with the relevant rules, and that end-users are duly informed on how their data are protected.

The portal Canada.ca provides extensive information on security of online government services, as well as relevant guidance in a dedicated webpage (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4. Security of online government services on Canada.ca

Source: (Government of Canada, 2022[7]).

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Effective Government Information Websites

TOOLKIT FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Government information websites are an important tool for governments seeking to improve communications, ease administrative burdens and provide greater access to public services for citizens and businesses. Effective information websites, centred on users' needs, can ensure a trustworthy information exchange between citizens and the public administration. This report looks at how developing a fit-for-purpose search function, using predictive text, machine learning techniques, and other functionalities, can contribute to effective information websites. It presents recommendations as well as guidelines for ensuring high-quality standards across government information websites, including upgrading them into transactional portals, where citizens may easily access public services and communicate with government agencies about their needs.

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