European public administrations ISA: interoperability solutions

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The Commission presents its report on the findings and recommendations of the interim evaluation on interoperability solutions for European public administrations (ISA2).

As provided for in the ISA2 Decision, on 1 January 2016 the five-year programme on interoperability solutions and common frameworks for European public administrations, businesses and citizens (ISA2 programme) was launched as a follow-up to the ISA programme.

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the interim evaluation of the ISA2 programme. Under this Decision, the Commission is required to carry out this evaluation and communicate its results to the European Parliament and the Council by 30 September 2019. Data was collected from 129 consulted stakeholders, extensive desk research, and expert assessments

Overall findings

The interim evaluation confirms that ISA2 performs well in all the evaluation criteria. However, the evaluation is confined to actions funded between 2016 and 2018. Hence, the results of ongoing actions as well the longer-term outcomes of ISA2 can only be captured after the programme finishes.

Relevance

The objectives pursued by ISA2 are still pertinent in relation to the evolving needs and problems in the field of interoperability of digital public services, confirming the programme's relevance. Most of the consulted stakeholders agree that the problem of administrative e-barriers and related needs originally identified by the programme are still valid.

Further collaboration and exchanges with regional and local administrations are needed in order to increase awareness of interoperability and the take-up of ISA2 solutions at the subnational level. Raising public administrations' awareness on interoperability was the first of the three recommendations in the final evaluation of the ISA programme.

The ISA2 programme acted upon this call by adopting its communication strategy and engagement plan in 2017 and by organising 10 major events between 2016 and 2018, with an average of 211 participants per event. The programme should continue its awareness-raising activities targeting regional and local administrations and possibly indirect beneficiaries, like citizens and businesses.

Effectiveness

The results achieved so far by ISA2 are aligned with the programme's objectives. Nevertheless, they still do not fully match the expected results, as most of the actions are still ongoing and solutions are still being developed. The duration of the programme also influences the take-up rate of solutions. There is one specific ISA2 objective where the evaluation found that the programme on its own is less effective: the development of a more effective, simplified and user-friendly e-administration at the national, regional and local level. Here Member States can in fact have a great impact, and complement the EU-level initiatives on interoperability and digitalisation. External factors can improve but also jeopardise the way in which the programme achieves its objectives and delivers its results.

Efficiency

The programme's implementation is progressing as planned; all actions are either on track or close to achieving the planned level of work. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of performance indicators makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the programme's overall cost-effectiveness.

For those ISA2 packages where it was possible to aggregate performance indicators of different actions, costs per end-user (e.g. businesses, citizens) have been estimated as very low. The process for selecting actions funded by ISA2 is considered relatively efficient.

EU added value

The level of coordination ensured by ISA2 is crucial to improving the overall interoperability among European public administrations. In addition, 91 out of 109 respondents emphasised that ISA2 is able to achieve its objectives at a lower cost than comparable national or sub-national initiatives.

ISA2 has also helped to further common EU policies: it plays a central role in implementing the European Interoperability Framework (EIF) and supports the establishment of the digital single market

Recommendations

The interim evaluation paints a positive picture of the ISA2 programme's performance so far. However, it also identifies areas for possible improvement.

- *Awareness-raising beyond national administrations*: the Commission, through the ISA2 programme, will continue its efforts to raise the European public sector's awareness of interoperability, which is a key enabler of digitalisation, especially ensuring more collaboration with the regional and local administrations during this work. In the ISA2 programme's final stage, even more emphasis should be put on ensuring that public administrations, academia and interested professionals share best practices among themselves.

- *From user-centric to user-driven solutions*: to increase the programme's utility, ISA2 could improve the quality of its existing solutions by better considering user needs. This approach could prevail during the implementation of the last ISA2 work programme, thus promoting the EIF principle on user-centricity both in the Commission and in the Member States. However, in the coming years it is advisable to move from a user-centric to a user-driven paradigm, where users become involved in the design phase of an interoperability solution. An interoperability incubator could foster such a co-creation process, which would allow for new, user-oriented solutions to be experimented with and prototyped in a safe environment.

Increased sustainability

When assessing the EU added value and sustainability of the ISA2 programme, the interim evaluation found that it plays an essential role in setting up a uniform interoperability landscape in the European public sector. After the ISA2 programme ends, it is vital to preserve and increase the ability of European public administrations to work together towards attaining mutually beneficial goals, involving the sharing of information and knowledge, which is at the core of interoperability at large. For that, strong political commitment and solid funding are needed.

Funding

Concerning the future funding for interoperability, it is envisaged in the Digital Europe Programme (DEP), which is one of the Commission's sectoral proposals under the MFF 2021-2027 legislative

package. In addition, the Commission should act upon the synergies created between ISA2 and other EU programmes to promote the EIF and interoperability in general and to facilitate the broad reuse of ISA2 solutions.

Follow up

The interim report noted that in the ongoing implementation of the ISA2 programme, the Commission will pay the utmost attention to the above findings and recommendations, analysing them to validate and address the issues raised, wherever appropriate in close cooperation with the Member States. The findings and recommendations of the ISA2 programme's interim evaluation will also inform the transition to the new MFF programmes.