

Uptake of online public services

Citizens and businesses increasingly prefer and use digital channels to interact with governments and access public services. Online channels can facilitate access to a wider range of users and provide greater convenience, while also reducing costs for all involved, including governments. While in general the adoption of online channels is growing, several kinds of gaps in the uptake remain in many OECD member countries, where usage of online services remains more limited. Governments must continue to work on reducing such disparities while still developing their online service supply.

Businesses' uptake of online public services

Online public service provision can help businesses save time and reduce administrative burdens, increasing also the likeliness of applying ICTs in operations as a means to improve productivity. As firms are considered more ready to use online public services than citizens, countries are taking measures to increase the high uptake levels even further, for example by making selected online transactions mandatory. Iceland, Finland and the Slovak Republic among others have a high level of general online interaction with public authorities, although a different trend emerges when examining the use of fully transactional services, such as electronic handling of administrative procedures. Here Australia, France and Slovenia rank highest among member countries. Country-specific legislation, differences in mandatory requirements for using online services, and the use of intermediaries in service delivery can contribute to explaining variations across countries.

Large firms (250 or more employees) generally have a very high level of e-government uptake; however, they account on average for less than 1% of the total number of firms across the OECD area. Medium-sized firms (50-249 employees) are closer to the uptake of large firms; however, there is a considerable uptake gap between large and small firms (10-49 employees) across countries. Countries such as Australia, Hungary, Italy, Korea and Spain display some of the largest disparities in uptake between large and small enterprises.

Increasing business uptake holds double benefits. Focusing on increasing the business uptake of online channels for public service delivery may help governments reduce expenditures. As such, governments are increasingly selecting services where digital interaction with businesses can be made fully mandatory (e.g. VAT tax filings, permits or registrations). Additionally, while the uptake of online public services is lower in smaller firms, small and medium-sized firms remain important drivers of growth in OECD countries. Hence, paying particular attention to boosting access and ICT capacities can nurture economic growth generally, not only in areas related to the Internet.

Citizens' uptake of online public services

Relative to firms, citizens resort less to online channels when accessing public services. Nordic countries lead in this regard, both in terms of citizen use of Internet to generally

interact with the government as well as for more advanced actions, such as sending filled forms. France, Ireland and the Netherlands, also have high citizen use of the Internet to send filled forms to public authorities.

The average rates of citizen use of e-government can translate into significant disparities by age, educational attainment or income levels. For example, the age group with the highest level of interaction with public authorities is individuals from 25 to 34 year-old. Comparing with the younger population of 16 to 24-year-olds, a "youth gap" in the take-up of e-government services seems to appear. Several reasons can be suggested: for example, 16-24 year olds might use fewer public services in general as they may remain dependents of households. In some countries, some of the most commonly deployed e-government services, such as tax filings, are either not relevant or are not necessarily dealt with by the youngest age group. On the other hand, issues such as voter registration, driving licenses, benefits claims, education and work choices do require dealing with public authorities in many countries, also for younger parts of the population indicating an actual challenge.

Elderly citizens are also less likely to adopt Internet channels for accessing public services. In a number of countries, there is a considerable disparity when comparing the use of the Internet for online government services between individuals aged 25 to 34 years and those aged 65 to 74. Again, several explanations can be suggested. The lack of digital skills is one key barrier for the older age group, with adverse implications in the short to medium term for governments striving to address demographic changes through greater use of digital welfare services, for example e-health services such as telemedicine.

Governments are undertaking a number of measures to increase citizens' uptake, for example, identifying services where users are ready to have physical service delivery channels closed down; or providing incentives to use digital channels, such as reduced speed in paper proceedings or even transaction fees attached to face-to face services. Specific segments of the population, for example university students, are intensive users of Internet and can more easily be required to use electronic channels, as is the case in Denmark. In Canada, offering support in the transition to digital channels, for example through the use of social media and video clips, is helping increase the uptake of online services. Where some countries are introducing a "digital by default" approach through mandatory communication channels, other countries, such as the United Kingdom, are seeking to establish "a pull" by increasing the preference for digital channels by delivering online services of high quality.

One-way interactions with government (e.g. obtaining information) remain more common for both citizens and firms than more advanced, transactional interactions (e.g. full electronic case handling or sending in completed forms). Implementing adequate enabling infrastructures and helping users evolve to the latter stage of online interaction are key for governments to fully exploit the potential efficiency gains of ICTs in service delivery.

Methodology and definitions

Indicators on citizens and businesses are based on Eurostat's *Information Society Statistics* (database) and the OECD's *ICT Database*. The indicators evaluate the share of citizens and businesses using the Internet to interact with public authorities. The two sources are methodologically comparable. Data are collected by national statistical offices based on Eurostat's annual Model Survey on ICT Usage and E-Commerce in Businesses and annual Community Survey on ICT Usage in Households and by Individuals.

The data show interaction with public authorities by the Internet. Public authorities refer to both public services and administration activities, at all levels of government. Interaction is a derived indicator covering subcategories of various actions performed through the Internet, such as obtaining information, downloading and sending forms, or completing administrative procedures and case handling. While the use of intermediaries is widespread in a number of countries, this is not captured in the survey data.

The e-government uptake indicator measures the percentages of firms or citizens who have used the Internet to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months preceding the survey. The 12-month period allows for comparisons across countries with differing schedules of service transactions across sectors. Firms with 10 or more employees are covered, not including the financial sector. Individuals between 16 and 74 are covered.

Further reading

OECD/International Telecommunication Union (2011), *M-Government: Mobile Technologies for Responsive Governments and Connected Societies*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264118706-en>.

OECD (2009), *Rethinking e-Government Services: User-Centred Approaches*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264059412-en>.

Figure notes

9.4: Data unavailable for Canada, Chile, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and the United States. Data unavailable on full electronic interaction for Switzerland and on obtaining information for Australia. Data for Australia, Chile, Korea, New Zealand, and Switzerland refer only to obtaining information, not general interaction, and include the financial sector. Data for Australia refer to 2010, data for Iceland, the United Kingdom and New Zealand refer to 2012. Data for Belgium and Finland on Internet interaction refer to 2012; data for Belgium, Finland, Iceland and the United Kingdom on electronic administrative procedures refer to full electronic case handling in 2010.

9.5: Data unavailable for Canada, Chile, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and the United States. Data for Australia, Korea, New Zealand and Switzerland refer only to obtaining information, not general interaction, and include the financial sector. Data for Korea and Switzerland refer to 2011. Data for Australia refer to 2010 and cover use of the Internet to complete forms electronically.

9.6: Data unavailable for Korea, Mexico, Turkey and the United States. Data unavailable on sending filled forms for Australia, Israel and Switzerland, and on interaction with public authorities for Japan. Data for Canada, Switzerland and New Zealand refer only to obtaining information, not general interaction. Data for Israel cover citizens aged 20 and above and cover both obtaining information and filling in forms on line. Data for Canada refer to 2009, data for Australia, Israel and Switzerland refer to 2010. Data for New Zealand refer to downloading forms rather than sending filled forms.

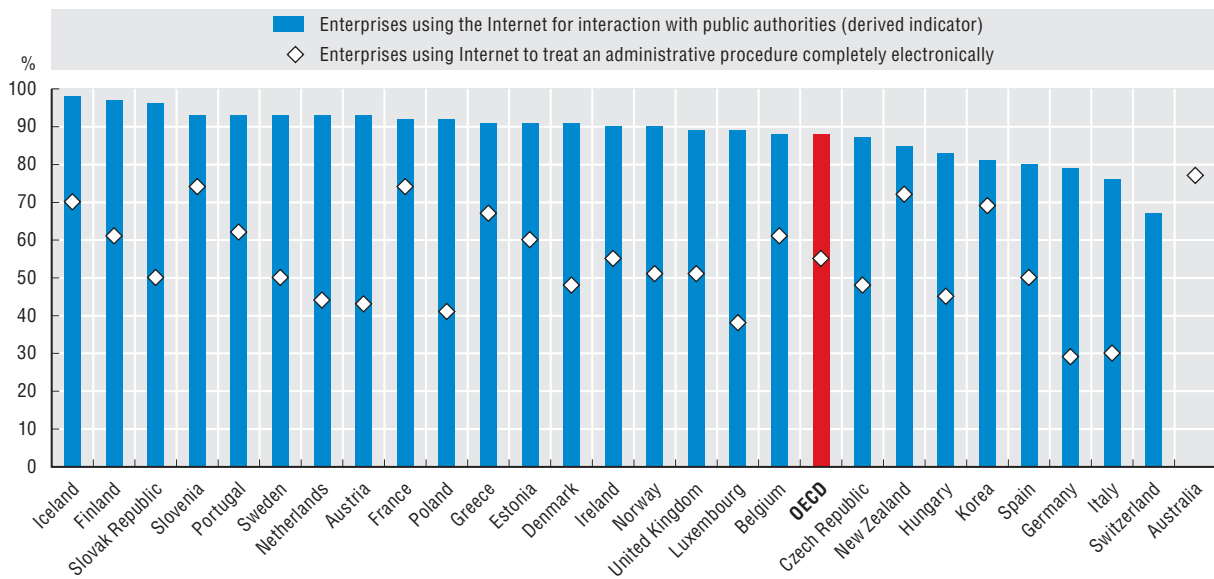
9.7: Data unavailable for Japan, Korea, Mexico, Turkey and the United States. Data for Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Israel and Switzerland refer only to obtaining information, not general interaction. In these countries the age group "25-34 years old" refers rather to individuals between 25 and 44 years of age. Data for Chile refer to the 25-64 years age group. Data for Israel cover citizens aged 20 and above and cover both obtaining information and filling in forms on line. Data for Canada, Israel and Switzerland refer to 2010.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

9. SPECIAL FEATURE – SERVING CITIZENS

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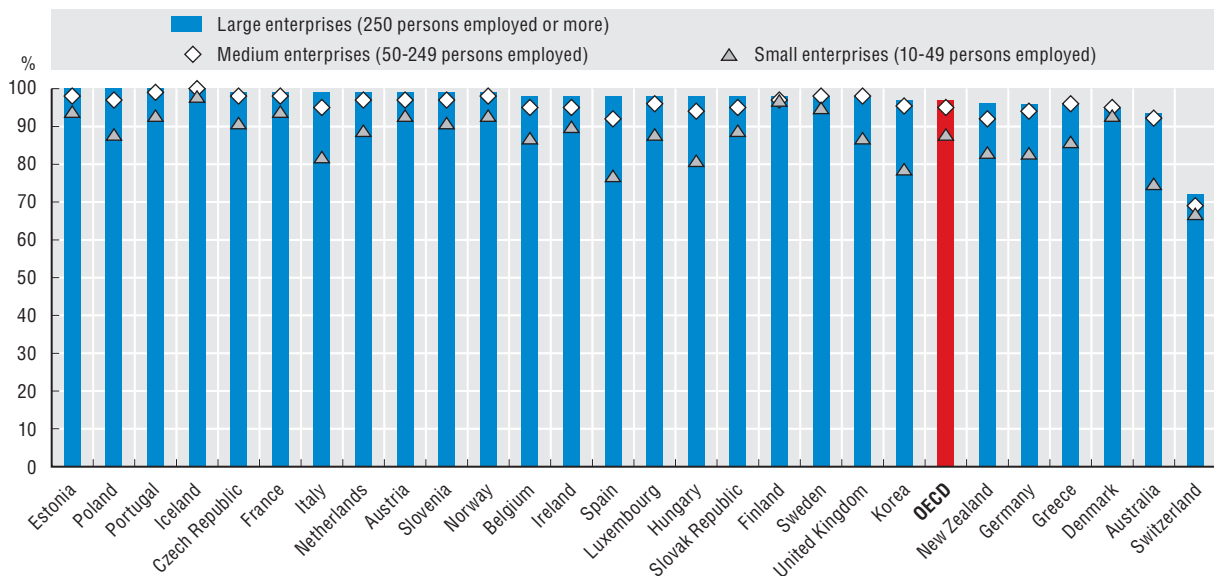
9.4. Firms using the Internet to interact with public authorities by type of activity (2011)



Source: OECD, ICT Database; and Eurostat, Information Society Statistics (database).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932943001>

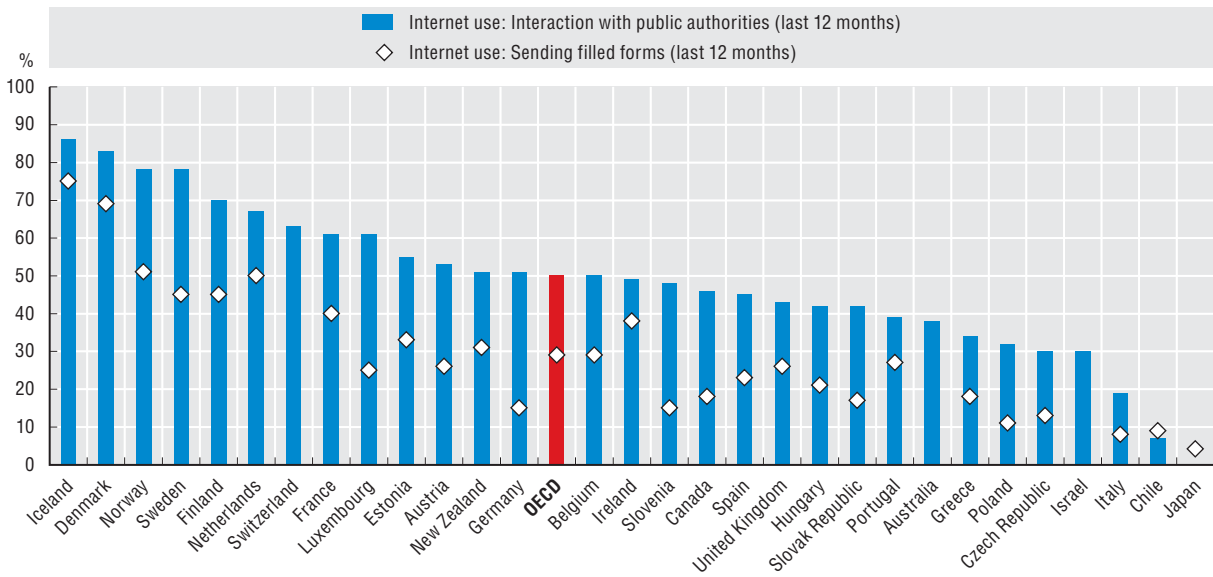
9.5. Firms using the Internet to interact with public authorities by firm size (2012)



Source: OECD, ICT Database; and Eurostat, Information Society Statistics (database).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932943020>

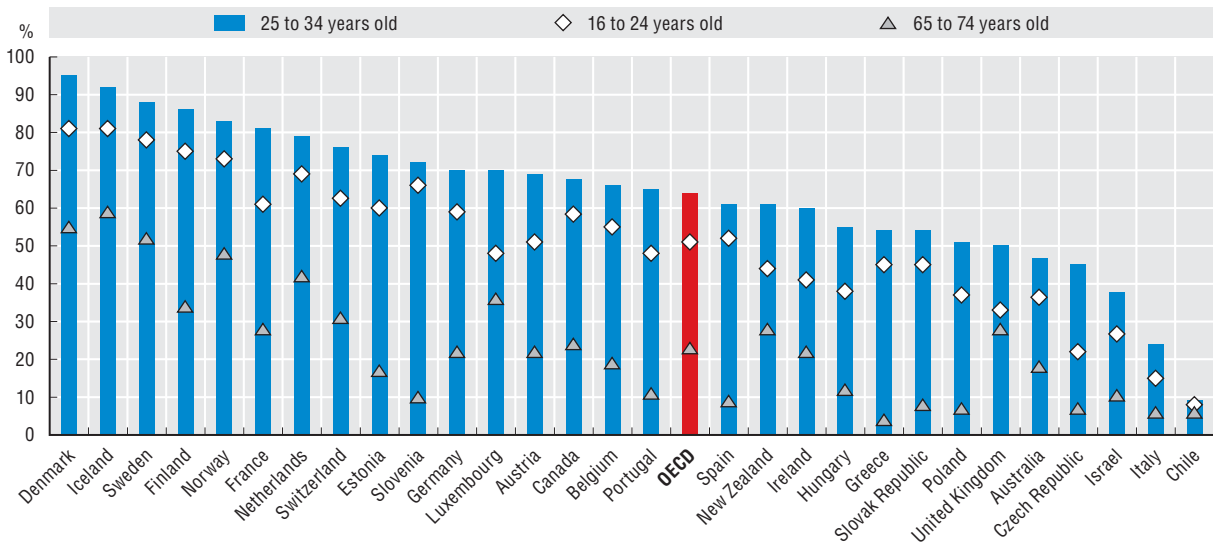
9.6. Citizens using the Internet to interact with public authorities by type of activity (2012)



Source: OECD, ICT Database; and Eurostat, Information Society Statistics (database).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932943039>

9.7. Citizens using the Internet to interact with public authorities by age group (2012)



Source: OECD, ICT Database; and Eurostat, Information Society Statistics (database).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932943058>



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